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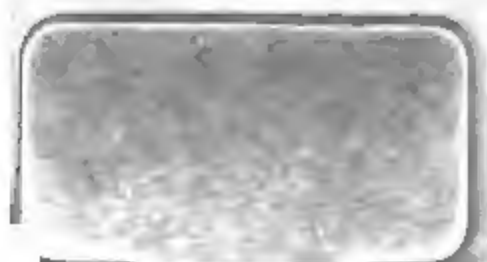
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THE
QUIET HUSBAND,

BY
MISS ELLEN PICKERING,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER," "THE PRINCE
AND THE PEDLAR," "NAN DARRELL,"
"THE FRIGHT," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE QUIET HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

“WHERE are you going, Flint?” asked Mrs Ashton of Ashton Grove, who was picking her way along the dirty village road with most admirable skill, steadying herself as she paused to put the question on two rather unsteady stones, placed (or more properly speaking thrown) to facilitate the crossing of foot passengers. “Where can you be going in such haste on Mr. Robert’s hunter?” repeated the impatient lady, leaving no time for reply

from the sturdy, and deliberate person she addressed.

“ I am going to Swinton, ma’am,” answered the bailiff, drawing up his young master’s hunter so abruptly in the middle of the sloppy road, as to scatter the mud over his mistress’s dress.

On reconsidering the occurrence an hour after, Mrs. Ashton saw petty malice and covert disrespect under an action so unusually sudden, for Thomas Flinter was, on most occasions, thoughtful and slow to a proverb; but her curiosity being too much excited at the moment to admit the entrance of any other feeling, she continued the conversation without a comment on the splashing.

“ Going to Farmer Headman’s I suppose; you spend half your time there. But why can’t you take your own pony, since there is one kept on purpose for you, instead of Mr. Robert’s hunter? If you should lame it I don’t know what Mr. Robert will say.”

“Master told me to take the hunter, ma’am,” replied the sturdy bailiff, who considered that such an answer was, or ought to be, conclusive and satisfactory, showing, at the same time, by the compression of his lips, and the drawing down of their corners, that he was by no means pleased with being catechised, and intended, according to his wont, particularly when addressed by Mrs. Ashton, to tell no more than should be absolutely extorted from him by questioning and cross questioning, one of his greatest delights being to baffle interrogators by the brevity yet truth of his replies; for Thomas Flinter was a most conscientious disciple of the true—a despiser of the beautiful, and an abhorrer of the new.

“Ah! that is just like your master; he never thinks of any thing, and quite forgets that piece of rough road before you get to Swinton, though I told him of it only yesterday, and talked to him half an hour

about indicting it. Well! if you lame the hunter it will be no doing of mine. Slave as I may to keep all things in order, I can get nothing done right."

The thick lips of the sober, sturdy bailiff relaxed in their compressure the least little bit in the world; but this was the only token of his having heard the lady's complaint, and she proceeded without waiting for a reply.

"Before you go to Swinton, you had better ride to Fector's Close, for, as I came by this morning, I saw Purcell's pigs trying to get through the hedge into the turnips. There was no one at their cottage to send to drive them away; and it was too dirty to go myself. I am sure those pigs are not properly rung. Tell Purcell I must have them pounded unless he can keep them out of our grounds."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the bailiff shortly.

"But you are going the wrong way," cried Mrs. Ashton, sharply. "I told you Fector's Close, not Purton's Close."

“ Yes, ma’am ; but I must go to Swinton first.”

“ Why so ?”

“ ’Cause it’s master’s orders, ma’am.”

“ You can go there afterwards. The pigs will destroy all the turnips, and Farmer Headman will be sure to be at home at dinner time.”

“ Master told me to go to Swinton as fast as I could, ma’am,” answered Flintor doggedly.

“ But he did not know of the pigs,” remarked Mrs. Ashton, as resolute in her purpose of having her own way, as Flintor was in opposing her.

“ I dare say not, ma’am ; master don’t purtend to know every thing—as some do.”

“ You can go to Headman’s afterwards,” persisted his lady.

“ I don’t want to go there at all, ma’am.”

“ Where are you going to then in Swinton ?”

“ To the Cross Keys, ma’am.”

“Ah! Flinter, will you never take warning?” exclaimed his mistress triumphant at having elicited the truth, and rejoicing in the idea that she had found a legitimate excuse for a lecture. “Will you never see the evil of spending so much time at the Cross Keys? I am sure I have talked to you more than enough on the subject.”

“That you have, ma’am ;—never a truer word spoken !” said the bailiff heartily.

“And yet it is all of no use,” continued his lady. “There you sit evening after evening drinking and gossiping with Farmer Pratt, and Farmer Long ; spending your money, instead of laying it by to make your old age comfortable.”

“I ain’t a going to gossip, or spend any money ma’am,” replied the bailiff in a vexed tone, conscious that the charge of his evening sojourning at the Cross Keys was correct, though only two instances of a failure in sobriety could be proved against him during a

life extending to more than fifty years; and one of those was at the birth of Master Robert, the eldest son and heir. "I must talk to the the farmers about the price of corn and hay," he added in a lower voice.

"You had much better not go to the Cross Keys at all: it is a great temptation. Your Master should have thought of this, and not sent you into harm's way. What are you going for?"

"On business of my master's ma'am."

"What business?" demanded the lady, her curiosity taking a new turn.

"To order something, ma'am?"

"To order what?" questioned the lady more eagerly, the bailiff's provokingly short answers rendering her curiosity more vivid.

"Post horses, ma'am," replied Flinter with most annoying slowness.

"Post horses! Bless me! what can he want with post horses?" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton in a perfect fever of agitation from curiosity

and wonder. Why cannot he have his own horses if he wishes to pay a visit?"

"They are gone to Harston, ma'am, to fetch coals."

"Ay, the horses are always engaged about the farm just when they are wanted. But why can't your master wait till to-morrow? What can he want post horses for in such a hurry?"

"I did not ax him, ma'am," replied the bailiff, permitting the fiery hunter of intent, or through bad horsemanship, to curvet about in the muddy road to the great detriment of Mrs. Ashton's gown, adding drily: "I never axes more questions than there is need of."

"Nor give longer answers than you can help," remarked his lady rather sharply; by no means satisfied of his respect from his particularity in saying ma'am at the close of every sentence, having always found him most especially particular in the use of that monosyllable, as he made it, when most resolved

on baffling her curiosity. "I heard nothing of this an hour since. Did not your Master say where he was going to?"

"I think, ma'am, he said some'at about going to meet the coach at Dingley Hollow, and Manchester, or Liverpool, or some such outlandish place."

"Manchester? dear me! then he must have heard some bad news from his cousin. Did he say anything of Mr. Harman, Flinter?"

"Not a word, ma'am, as I heard. He only told me to ride to Swinton on Master Robert's hunter as fast as I could, for fear he should miss the coach; and so ma'am, I hope you won't delay me with any more questions or master may be vexed."

"I have no wish to delay you with questions, and had you told me this at first should not have stopped you at all," replied Mrs. Ashton with a lofty air. "Make haste, as your Master told you; but when you have

ordered the horses and seen about the pigs, you had better call at Mrs. Praed's. I hear she has a new harrow just come down, which is to work wonders, and clear the land from weeds ; and I am sure our farm wants weeding sadly."

"I'll go if I have time, ma'am ; but there is a rough piece of road near Mrs. Praed's that might lame Master Robert's hunter. And what should ladies know about harrows? —t'ain't in their way," replied the bailiff bluntly, leaving his mistress to take the last part of his speech to herself, or apply it to Mrs. Praed just as she chose ; setting off as he concluded at a speed astonishing to those, who had only seen the sober pace at which he generally trotted his sober pony, an animal nearly as sturdy in make, and deliberative in movements as his rider.

Whether this rapidity of motion was to please Mr. Ashton, or get rid of his own ill

humour, his thoughts for the next few minutes half muttered to the winds, half kept to himself may enable us to judge—

“Yes, yes: I’ll go and look arter them pigs quick enough, as them Purcells shall find; for their getting into the turmits, the finest crop in all the county, is monstrous vexing though, I would not let missus see as how I cared a pin about it. It is a shame of them Purcells letting the poor animals, that don’t know no better, go a trespassing; and it ain’t for want neither, for they might be well to do in the world, or it would be a different matter. I don’t blame the pigs, no how. But as for the harrow—I shan’t go laming Master Robert’s hunter and wasting my time a riding over there. What can Mrs. Praed tell of harrows I should like to know? or her new fangled bailiff either, that she must have all the way out of Scotland forsooth? as if an Englishman could not do for her, but she must have a furriner, who

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is for all the new things and new ways, which never answers. Give me the old ways I larnt of my father, and he of my grandfather afore him. Where would you see better crops than their's? Ay, or mine either, though I says it, as should not say it! I'll show them there turmits against the county, and all the Scotchmen in the land. Why they lives upon oatmeal for breakfast and dinner in Scotland; and the inside of a sheep, as gentlemen and all christian people gives to their dogs. There is a country for you! What should thay know of farming, or any thing else? Not but what thay haves some pretty cattle too; but then they grows wild without their help. Then there is missus always talking about the weeds, and wanting the farm to look as tidy as the best drawing-room, just arter she have turned every body out, and put every thing in its place. Why it is impossible for mortal man to do it! Won't weeds grow whether you will or no? and if

you pulls up one to-day, won't you find six more in the same hole to-morrow? and if you spends all the money where is the profit? Clean fields, and clean purses go together to my thinking. If the sun shines and the rain falls weeds will grow;—and if the sun don't shine, nor the rain fall how should the crops grow pray? Not that there are more weeds in our fields than in our neighbours:—no, nor so many neither; but then missus is never satisfied do what you will. Talk! talk! talk!—ax! ax! ax! I never knew a woman ax so many questions in all my life. I wonder if she ever axes the birds why they sing, or what they sing? I have heard her scold the old black rooks for eating up the corn and trying to look so harmless all the while. Now Master is quite a different sort of a person, he never axes no more nor he can helps; but then he knows I manage all for the good of the family: so there is no need of his interfering; and he lets things go

on there own way; but missus!—their is no quiet in her; she is never contented unless she can poke her finger into every body's pie, and she ain't contented then. But there it is of no use talking: Missus will be Missus to the end of the last harvest;—a talking about every thing, and at every body. I do believe when she is laid in her coffin that she will ax the sexton about digging the grave. Yet she ain't so bad in some things neither. She is kind to the poor any how, though she won't let them boil their pots nor nurse their children as they likes; but she don't know nothing about farming—that is sertain."

Thus ended the muttered soliloquy of honest Flinter, and giving the hunter a thump with the large oaken stick, which was his inseparable companion, he proceeded towards Swinton at a pace, which promised to bring him very shortly to the Cross Keys.

At the same time on trudged Mrs. Ashton towards Ashton Grove, picking her way along

the muddy road with well practised skill ; and so great was her impatience to ascertain the cause of her unlocomotive husband's intended journey to Manchester, or some such outlandish place, that she absolutely only stopped to question and lecture two women, and one boy, out of the seven persons whom she encountered on her homeward route.

"My dear, what can you be going to Manchester for?" demanded Mrs. Ashton, bouncing (we really can give the lady's mode of entrance no more elegant term) into her husband's study.

"I am not going to Manchester, my dear," replied the quiet owner of the mansion, continuing to arrange his dressing case, after bestowing one look of surprise on his ever active lady.

"There ! that is just like Flinter : he told me you were ; but there is no getting the truth out of him, question as you will ;" exclaimed the breathless Mrs. Ashton, sinking into a

chair. "I dare say you never ordered him to take Robert's hunter to Swinton."

"Flinter misunderstood me, that is all: I never knew him tell a falsehood in my life."

"No such great merit in that, when he says so little."

Perhaps Mr. Ashton had a passing thought that others might be improved by following Flinter's example; but he did not say so; and the vexed lady continued.

"Upon my word, Mr. Ashton, he gets worse and worse, and you really must part with him, for there is no putting up with his impertinence. There he kept me standing nearly a quarter of an hour in the dirty road, instead of giving me a proper answer at once. Then he fancies that no one knows anything of farming but himself; and all the while he is as ignorant, obstinate, and pig-headed as can be. I really shall be obliged to give him warning myself some day."

“It will be of no use if you do, my dear; he will not go.”

“Not if you uphold him against me, Mr. Ashton, as, I am sorry to say, you always do. The story goes that he has declared his resolution to live and die in your service.”

“I dare say he has.”

“Then it was a most impertinent declaration; and you ought to show him that you will be master, and have what servants you please. I am sure we might easily get a better bailiff. There is Mrs. Praed now;—but you are packing your dressing box after all. I thought you said you were not going to Manchester.”

“Nor am I, though somewhere in the same county.”

“That is just like you, Mr. Ashton! You are almost as bad as Flinter; there is no getting the truth out of you without so many questions. I see by your face that something

dreadful has happened. Why did not you tell me at once that your cousin Harman was dangerously ill? I thought it would be thus, he looked so black under the eyes when he was last here; and would not take my advice, though I am sure I could have cured him; but no one ever attends to me till too late. What medical man has he called in? Doctor Putnam, or Doctor Fuller?"

"Neither, that I know of, my dear."

"Why not?"

"I am not aware that he requires a medical man: when I last heard he was quite well."

"Then why are you going to Nelson Villa in such haste, sending Flinter on Robert's hunter, who I am sure will break his knees?"

"I am not going to Nelson Villa," replied her husband, who showed as great an objection to being questioned as to his movements, as Flinter himself.

“Not going to Nelson Villa! Then where can you be going? You said nothing to me of this before I went out.”

“How could I my dear? The post had not arrived then: and I could not possibly foresee the awful summons it would bring.”

“No, Mr. Ashton, you never foresee any thing. But what is the matter? for you look as white as a sheet, and your lips are quivering now. Are all the children well?—and my brother’s family?”

“Yes, yes, Sarah; all well!” replied Mr. Ashton a little impatiently.

“But where are you going; for you tell me nothing?”

“To Liverpool,” said her husband in a low tone, and in some embarrassment.

“To Liverpool? Now I see it;” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, delight at her fancied foresight triumphing over her sorrow at their fancied misfortune. “Mr. Wagstaff, for whom you would stand surety, though I advised you not,

has run away—or become a bankrupt—or some such thing; and we are all beggars. I knew it would come to that !”

“ Nonsense, my dear : if Wagstaff ran away, you would still have a handsome jointure :—this is no question of money.”

“ I was not thinking of myself, but of you and the children,” observed Mrs. Ashton reproachfully.

“ I am sure you were, Sarah,” replied her husband kindly.

“ But what is the matter, Mr. Ashton ? Shall I never hear ? It is no little thing that could move you so much :—but perhaps you do not wish to trust me—so I will ask no more questions.”

“ Indeed, Sarah, I wish no concealment. This morning’s post has brought me a letter from Mrs. Clare, begging me to go to her immediately.”

“ Oh ! Miss Moffatt that was—your guardian’s daughter. The young lady whom you

fancied in your boyish days, only her father and brother said "No," you being then a younger son. I did not know you corresponded with her," remarked Mrs. Ashton, trying, but in vain, to appear indifferent.

"She whom I loved with my whole heart in my youth, and respect and regard in my age!" observed Mr. Ashton with unwonted warmth. "She is dying!" he added in a hollow tone.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Ashton with genuine sympathy. "But it is odd her sending for you," she continued after a moment's pause.

"She has no other friend. Her father and brother have long been dead; and her husband died suddenly a week ago, unable to bear up against the dread of being declared a bankrupt. She is left penniless with an only daughter, reared in luxury."

"Poor things! Poor things!" exclaimed his wife with still deeper pity: for, as Flinter

had said, she was not so bad after all, though she would poke her finger into every body's pie. "Come and sit by me on the sofa; and we will consult what is best to be done," she continued, leading her husband to a seat, shocked at beholding such unwonted emotion. "How came this about? I thought Mr. Clare was rolling in riches."

"So it was supposed; but some unfortunate speculations, with unforeseen losses, and the dishonesty of a false friend, and lately admitted partner, have accomplished his ruin; and the principal creditor, a rejected suitor of Mrs. Clare's, will show no pity for the widow and orphan, though the former is given over by her physicians:—at least, this is what I understand from her hurried and incoherent letter."

"Ay poor thing; not very clear, I dare say with so many sorrows pressing on her. To lose her fortune is bad enough; but to be left a widow, is far worse," said Mrs. Ashton, the tears coming into her eyes as she looked

affectionately on her husband." I may say sharp things sometimes, but I do not mean them; I always pray not to be left a widow. I am a little quick in temper occasionally; but you will forget that when I am gone."

"I owe you more than I can ever repay for five and twenty years of careful affection," replied her husband, pressing her hand; and too much touched by her words to remember at the moment how often her over care for himself and his concerns had fidgeted him, and every one else within her reach.

"Thank you, my dear, for saying so," said Mrs. Ashton with a faltering tone. Then, after a brief pause, resuming her favorite office of questioner, she asked—"Had Mr. Clare no friends?"

"None, as I understand; he was not a person to make friends when rich, and poverty is proverbially friendless;—his widow and orphan have no earthly protector."

"They must come here;—or if they would

prefer a house of their own, they can have the cottage at Woodside. I will go and give orders to have it cleaned directly," cried Mrs. Ashton with the promptness of her nature, forgetting in her compassion some former occasional touches of jealousy.

"This is like yourself, Sarah!" said her grateful husband, looking on her as admiringly as he had done in his youthful days.

"Now I think of it, I will go down with you at once to Liverpool," cried Mrs. Ashton, turning back from the door, which she had already reached, in her haste to give orders for preparations at Woodside. "Mrs. Clare will be pleased with the attention; and I can devise so many things for her comfort which you will never think of. I shall soon be ready."

"Stop, stop!" said her husband, arresting her departure, just as she was leaving the room.

With all his regard for his active wife, and sense of her kindness, he did not desire her

presence at his approaching interview with his first, and now dying love. Her utter want of tact, and incapability of remaining quiet unfitted her to be the witness of a scene so sad—so harrowing.

“Mrs. Clare, I am sure, will feel truly grateful for your kind intention, of which I will inform her; but there are insuperable objections to those intentions being carried into effect. The delay necessary for your preparations would make me too late for the coach; and I must travel all night, for I fear there is not a moment to be lost. Besides, however grateful for your kindness, Mrs. Clare, considering the past, might not think Woodside an eligible residence should she recover, of which there seems but little hope:—she would not have summoned me whilst a chance of life remained.”

“I forgot all that;” said Mrs. Ashton compassionately, whilst her husband turned away to conceal his quivering lip.

“You forget all but the suggestions of your own warm heart,” remarked her husband, thankful for her sympathy, and doing full justice to her generous pity. “If our fears should be realised—if Mrs. Clare:” he paused, for the memory of his early love came back upon him, and after a separation of more than five and twenty years (for he had not seen her since her marriage) he could not speak of her approaching death with calmness.

“You must bring her child here:—she shall be as a daughter to us—as one of our own children,” said Mrs. Ashton, catching his meaning.

“God bless you, Sarah! and He will bless you for this kindness to the orphan,” exclaimed her husband fervently, throwing his arm around her for a moment, then abruptly quitting the room to conceal his emotion.

Mrs. Ashton’s kindness and pity were never passive. Instead of contenting herself with saying—I wish that poor child had a frock—or

that old woman a gown—if there were no materials in the house for either, and she could not have the carriage to go to Swinton, the horses being engaged in the farm (where, by the way, she asserted they always were engaged) she would trudge over to the next village, maugre wet, dirt, or heat—purchase the goods, after some little questioning or grumbling—snatch up the first pair of scissors that came to hand—cut out the various parts—then distribute those parts to all the working members of her household in parlour, hall, or kitchen, herself assisting in fitting and putting them together; hurrying each sempstress till the whole should be completed. With such active habits, it was not to be expected that Mrs. Ashton would spend much time in a sentimental reverie after her husband's departure. Two minutes thought of former times—a sigh—and another muttered “poor thing!” in allusion to Mrs. Clare, whose story she had heard from her husband

before their marriage, was all she could afford to passive pity; the next moment she was up and stirring; ordering and arranging all things for Mr. Ashton's travelling comfort. She looked herself to the packing of his clothes, that nothing might be forgotten;—she spoke herself to the postillion about speed and careful driving; and no sooner was the carriage out of sight than she began to turn the house topsy turvy by way of preparation for the expected visitor, making up her mind at once that Mrs. Clare must die, and that Miss Clare, (who she made out by reckoning to be about twenty) would certainly take up her abode at Ashton Grove.

Robert, the eldest son and owner of the hunter, to get out of the bustle, betook himself to paying morning visits, whilst Emma, the eldest daughter, listened to her mother's surmises and orders, answering one and trying to obey the other with her usual complying

sweetness, though, if permitted, she would much rather have crept into some quiet corner out of reach of the rumpus.

Mr. Ashton (solely owing to his wife's directions, as she declared) was in time for the coach at Dingley Hollow; and the kind and quiet owner of Ashton Grove pursued his journey to Liverpool with a heavy heart, to see on her death-bed her whom he had loved in his youth with a strength of affection which, if duty had subdued, time had not worn away.

CHAPTER II.

“PUT aside that curtain, Cecil; I would look out once more on the works of God, which I so loved to look upon in health; and the sun is shining in through that narrow chink, as if inviting me to hope,” said Mrs. Clare in a feeble voice, addressing her daughter who was sitting beside her in the darkened room, holding her hand in hers.

“You are better, my own dear mother—much better!” exclaimed the affectionate Cecil

resuming her place by the sufferer's side, after drawing aside the window curtains, and pressing her lips on her forehead as she reclined on the sofa supported by pillows. "Your voice is stronger; and there is a beautiful pink on your cheek: you will soon recover to bless your child."

"Hope it not, Cecil;—it cannot be!" said her mother faintly.

"Yes, yes, it can: you said yourself just now that this sunshine told of hope."

"Not earthly hope, my child;—I shall not see another sun."

"Oh! say not so, dear mother; you cannot—shall not leave me," exclaimed her agonised daughter, throwing her arms around her with passionate energy.

"Hush! hush! my child. I cannot bear those sobs," said Mrs. Clare, kissing her brow. "I would gain strength from you; and you but make me weaker. Be calm."

"Be calm—yet think of losing you! Oh!

mother, dearest mother, do not leave me all alone ! I have none left but you," cried Cecil wildly, her sad appeal broken by sobs.

" Say not so, Cecil : I leave you not alone : there is One mightier than man who will protect the orphan."

" Forgive my wilfulness, dear mother. I would fain bend beneath His chastening, but when I think of all that I have lost—" here choking sobs stopped Cecil's utterance; and as she glanced at her own black dress, and her mother's widow's cap, giving way to a fresh burst of grief, she again clung round her sole remaining parent, exclaiming wildly :—" Yes this I could have borne ; but to lose you too—to have none left to love, or love me !—If you die—I must die too. God will not deal so hardly as to take away my only stay."

" My child, I must not hear such fearful words. God deals not hardly with his sinful children. If he remove their earthly stay it is to draw them nearer to himself. In our pros-

perity I fear we thought too little of all this ; and now when sorrow comes upon us we murmur and rebel. Be grateful for the past, and trustful for the future. Confide in him, and he will not desert you. The love of man may be found false and fleeting—the love of God is as an ark of strength. Pray, pray, for resignation to His will.”

“ Not to lose you :—I cannot part with you,” said Cecil, but less wildly.

“ He gave his only Son, for you, my child.”

“ Oh, God forgive me ! I am very sinful,” faltered Cecil, bowing her face upon her mother’s shoulder, shamed into submission by this mild reproof.

“ We are all sinful, my child,” said her mother, pressing her to her heart ; “ but I did not expect this passionate grief, after my warnings not to hope.”

“ I could not—I would not believe those warnings. I must still hope”—replied Cecil fondly.

"No, no;" faltered Mrs. Clare, sinking back, exhausted by an exertion beyond her strength.

Cecil shocked at the change in her appearance flew for some reviving drops, and after a while Mrs. Clare was enabled to resume her gentle but earnest admonitions, and Cecil listened to her every word with a growing fear that she might not hear those loving accents long.

"It is getting late," said Mrs. Clare on awakening from a troubled sleep. "The sun is sinking—and yet he does not come."

"Who, dear mother?" asked her daughter.

"The friend of my youth to whose care I would confide you," replied the invalid, a faint flush coming into her cheek as she spoke. "I too am sinking,"—she added faintly.

"You have sat up too long:—let me call Missing," said Cecil anxiously.

"No," replied the sick woman, laying her hand on her arm to detain her. "I must see

him. And hark ! I hear a carriage. All else might change ; but he could not—thank God for granting the widow's prayer ! Go down, my child, and receive him : I would be alone for a short time. Let him come when I ring. Heaven bless you, Cecil."

The dying mother kissed her only child ; and the weeping girl went down to receive as a stranger, him who had loved her parent with a strength of affection few would have suspected from his placid temper.—His impressions if not quick were lasting.

Mr. Ashton started back with surprise on entering the splendid drawing-room of the late Mr. Clare from which, in consideration of his wife's illness, nothing had as yet been removed by the creditors. Every thing bespoke the wealth and gorgeous tastes of the deceased. The furniture was all of the most costly description. Pictures by the first artists living and dead adorned the walls ;—ornaments of gold and bronze, alabaster and

porphyry stood on the richly inlaid tables; and a splendid chandelier hung from the centre of the ceiling, its crystal drops glittering in the sun through its gauze covering. But it was none of this that startled the visitor—it was the vision of her so truly loved, and who advanced to greet him with the trace of sorrow on her features, but still with much of the brightness of youth. Just so had his Cecil looked in her younger days:—just such had been her deep, dark, hazel eyes, that could brighten with mirth, or soften with pity:—just such her long dark curls, though now put back in disorder, without a thought of tasteful arrangement:—just such her slight and graceful figure, bending like the willow, yet rounded into a statue-like symmetry.

“Cecil!” murmured the gazer, thinking only of their last sad meeting, and sadder parting, forgetting, for the moment, the lapse of years, and that this could not be his early love.

Cecil looked up in surprise at the tone, for

never once during her wedded life had Mrs. Clare even hinted to her daughter the tale of her former trials ; or told how her father and brother, for the sake of gold, had compelled her to give her hand to one whilst her heart was another's. Mr. Clare alone had known the truth : but even he could only guess from her failing health how ill his gold and pompous attentions had succeeded in healing her heart's deep wound.

"My mother will see you presently," said Cecil sadly, motioning her startled visitor to take a chair.

"I beg your pardon ;" said Mr. Ashton recovering from his surprise. "You are so like your mother that I forgot the past."

"So they say, would that I were like her too in mind."

"I am happy to hear that she is better," observed Mr. Ashton, his voice faltering as he saw Cecil's tears.

"This morning I thought her better—very

much better:—but now I cannot tell:—she is fainter and weaker; and there is a strange look in her eyes and she says—But will you come into another room?” said Cecil breaking off abruptly, and trying in vain to check her sobs. “I know not why I came into this apartment, it looks so large and gloomy, and feels so chill;—and the sun is sinking now—and I cannot bear to look upon it, for she is sinking too, and says she shall not see another day. This is very silly; and very wrong in me; and to a stranger:—but you looked so kindly.”

“And felt as kindly,” replied Mr. Ashton, taking her hand, and leading her into another room on the other side of the house. “Make no excuses, and do not look upon me as a stranger; but believe that I feel with you, and learn to regard me as a friend—a second father.”

Cecil thanked him in a low voice, and soothed by his gentle sympathy, was able to

conduct him with tolerable composure into Mrs. Clare's presence, on the ringing of her bell. Absorbed in her own sorrow, she remarked not her visitor's emotion as he entered her mother's chamber.

Mrs. Clare was the first to speak when left alone with her guest.

"You come at the call of a dying woman, as I knew you would; and Heaven bless you and yours for this kindness. I had no right to expect it for I broke my vows to you through fear, not duty. You were away—and they pressed me hard—father and brother; and I was weak and yielded. I erred in this; but in all else I strove to do my duty, and now can look upon you as a friend—a valued friend—but nothing more. I wronged you, Robert:—but you have forgiven me—have you not?—or else you will?"

"Talk not thus, Cecil," exclaimed Mr. Ashton whilst the large tears rolled down his cheeks unheeded. "Talk not thus! you did me no

wrong. I knew how it was :—you could never resist ; and I felt no anger. Would to heaven that I had not left you—then—”

“ Do not let us recur to former times,” said the invalid with firmness. “ Much as I have longed to receive an assurance of forgiveness from your own lips it was not for that I summoned you. I have not called you hither to mourn over the past ; but to provide for the future. I ask not your pity for myself—I seek your protection for another. The wealth that tempted my kindred has made itself wings and flown away ; and he who owned that wealth is in his grave. My child has now no father ;—another day, and she will have no mother.”

“ Say not so !” exclaimed Mr. Ashton, interrupting her. “ This is but a sickly fancy ;—your doctors give us hope ;—they—”

“ Cannot see the heart,” added Mrs. Clare, closing the sentence. “ Look upon me and ask yourself if I can live. The icy hand of

death is on me even now ; a mother's love alone could give me strength to meet you thus."

Struck by her words Mr. Ashton looked at her more attentively than his own emotion had before permitted ; and it was some minutes before he was sufficiently composed to resume the conversation.

" I know not if I was right in sending for you ;—and yet you will not blame me, I think," said Mrs. Clare. " I have no friend—no relative to whom I can confide my child, so young, and pardon a mother's blind affection, so lovely, and so worthy love. When I am gone —"

" She shall live with me—she shall be as my child," cried Mr. Ashton warmly.

" Shall she ?" exclaimed the sufferer, bending forward, and laying her long, white fingers on his arm as she gazed earnestly into his face.

“She shall;—doubt it not!” replied Mr. Ashton in answer to her eager question.

“Thank you! thank you! But Mrs. Ashton—your wife—will she?—I have no right to ask it,” faltered the sufferer, her bright look suddenly dimmed by a shade of anxiety.

“It was her own proposal; and she would have accompanied me hither had there been time for delay.”

“Indeed! But does she know?”

“Enough to ensure her kindness for your child. She knew when I gave her my hand, that she had won but a blighted heart;—that she could never be to me what you had been.”

“And yet she will receive my child?”

“Not only receive, but love her, Cecil. Do not mistrust her;—the world knows not her real worth.”

“And you will be her guardian—her protector?”

“ Her father, Cecil.”

“ She may be penniless.”

“ With a daughter’s love, she shall receive a daughter’s portion, should she require it. Can I say more ?”

“ Heaven bless you and her !” faltered the sufferer, sinking back on the pillows, exhausted by her late excitement, pale as a corpse, with her eyes closed ; but with a smile of peace upon her pallid lips.

Mr. Ashton bent over her in silent agony ; she seemed struggling for the power of utterance ; and he heard the murmured words—
“ My child.” He touched the hand-bell near, and Cecil was in the room in an instant, kneeling by her mother’s side, chafing her cold hands in hers.

“ I leave you to his care, my child ;—look on him as a father !” said Mrs. Clare in a low, hollow voice, pointing to Mr. Ashton.

“ I will regard her as a precious legacy,” replied that gentleman laying his hand with

solemnity on the head of the still kneeling, sobbing girl.

“Now I die happy!—thankful—most thankful for this mercy! May God bless you—and yours!—and bless my child!” faltered the dying mother, flinging her arms with a sudden effort round her weeping daughter.

It was the last token of that mother's love.—The clinging arms relaxed their grasp; and the head sank upon the bosom.

Mr. Ashton, withdrawing her gently from her child's support, replaced her on the sofa. Cecil looked with a shudder into her mother's face;—then, guessing the painful truth, with a wild cry sank senseless on the floor.

“Let me go to my mother!” exclaimed Cecil on recovering from her swoon, for they had borne her into another room.”

“Not yet, my child; you require rest;” replied Mr. Ashton, taking her hand with a father's gentleness.

“Child! Who calls me child? and who are you?” she demanded wildly.

“Your mother’s friend—the friend of her youth, to whose care and affection she has confided you.”

“Confided me!” exclaimed poor Cecil starting up and wringing her hands as the truth came full upon her. “Have I no mother?”

“You have friends who will strive to supply her place,” replied Mr. Ashton kindly, supporting her trembling frame.

The orphan girl, gazed on the speaker with a look that told her desolation; then, reading in his quivering lip and tearful eye the answer to her pleading glance, she wept on his shoulder unconsciously clinging to him certain of sympathy.

No other friend came forward to dispute with Mr. Ashton his right of following his early love to the grave, and protecting her only child; and so many claims on the estate

poured in that there was little chance of that child's inheriting a guinea of all her father's boasted wealth ; but this effected no change in Mr. Ashton's manner, indeed was no more than he had contemplated from the first. The final settlement of Mr. Clare's affairs, from the complication of his concerns, which his sudden death, caused by the bursting of a blood vessel, had left him no time to arrange, could not be completed for some years ; and being neither relative, creditor, nor legally appointed guardian, Mr. Ashton could have no voice in the necessary proceedings, a fact by no means displeasing to a man of his quiet, placid temper, who hated trouble, bustle, and business.

To soothe Cecil's sorrow was far more suited to his talents ; but that soothing partook of his general character, and consisted in silent sympathy, and quiet kindness, rather than active exertions to divert her thoughts from her late heavy misfortunes.

Blow had succeeded blow so quickly that poor Cecil sank for a time beneath the shock ; and it was a month before she was well enough to travel with her kind guardian towards Ashton Grove by easy stages ; and even then, though the body gathered strength, the mind still showed how deeply it had suffered ;—youth's buoyant spirits were all gone. She uttered no complaint—she tried to reward Mr. Ashton's watchful care by smiles ; but it was plain to see that she walked as one in a strange and desert land—lonely and desolate ;—bound by no tie to earth ; and yet was she so young and of such warm affections that her torn heart could never rest in peace loving and loved by none. Mr. Ashton had inspired her with perfect confidence in his regard ; and truly grateful for his kindness, she paid him the respectful attention of a child ;—but still he was not her father ;—Mrs. Ashton could not be her mother ;—she had no brother—she had no sister ;—she stood

alone in the world—a blighted, faded flower ; —despised by the worldly ; but how much despised, happily for her at the moment, she did not know ; her illness and succeeding departure from Liverpool having prevented her feeling the coldness, or hearing the bitter, remarks of those, who had formerly courted and flattered the wealthy heiress.

Mrs. Ashton, who received her young guest at the door, after leaving her in her own room with an injunction to lie down and sleep till dinner, only disturbed her thrice in the intermediate two hours to ascertain if she slept, the rest of her time being spent in questioning her husband, who with all his real regard for her worth, and gratitude for her attentions to himself and Cecil, could not help wishing that she could be persuaded of the wisdom of one regulation of the order of La Trappe.

“ How came you to be so late, my dear ? I have been expecting you these three hours, and would not have the luncheon sent away

on that account. Were the horses bad, or the post boys sulky? or perhaps it was that horrid piece of road near Swinton. Well now that you have found the inconvenience of it yourself, my dear, I really hope you will indict the road; I was nearly overturned there the other day; and I am sure Miss Clare must have been quite terrified. I am shocked for the honor of the county, that a stranger should see our roads in such a condition: you really must get it mended—or what will she think?”

“Nothing, my dear; she never remarked it,” replied her husband, cheated into a half smile at her supposing that poor Cecil cared for the mending of a few yards of turnpike road.

“You may think that she did not remark it, my dear, because she was too polite to make a comment; but that is no proof:—I remark a great many things myself, though I say but little about them.”

“What things are those, mamma?” asked

her eldest son, with an arch pretence at simplicity.

“What are you there still, Robert? I thought you were gone to show old Jenny how to take up the leaves. I am sure I begged you to do so a quarter of an hour since. She is so awkward at it; and really when once the leaves begin to fall there is no keeping any place in order, or fit to be seen. Look how stupidly she sets about it: do pray go and show her the proper way.”

“Teach deaf old Jenny how to take up leaves! A right proper and dignified employment for a fine young man of four and twenty!” exclaimed her son. “But I suppose I must go, or there will be no peace. The schoolmaster is abroad! so come Emma, and take a lesson,” he added seizing on his laughing sister, and dragging her out on the lawn.

“Jenny, my good woman, that is all in the wrong: you should always use your left hand instead of your right in picking up leaves—as

thus"—he shouted into the old woman's ear, giving her basket a dexterous twirl as he spoke so as to throw the leaves it contained exactly in the line of the autumn breeze, that scattered them about over lawn, path, and bed, in streams and eddies; to the infinite dismay of old Jenny herself, and the infinite amusement of old Jenny's grandson, a mischievous urchin standing near.

"Lawk Master Robert! what will missus say?" exclaimed poor Jenny, holding up her hands in absolute horror.

"Oh! your missus sent me to teach you how to pick up the leaves," replied Master Robert turning away with a laugh.

"A right proper and dignified feat for a fine young man of four and twenty!" observed his sister demurely. "If such is to be the teaching of the schoolmaster, I will have none of his lessons."

"Why I do believe you have something of the dunce about you, Emma, or you never

could submit so quietly to all my mother's fidgets."

"Thank you," replied Emma making a low courtesy.

"There is no putting you out of temper Emmy; and that is very provoking."

"On the contrary, I am ashamed to say that I am very often most wickedly cross; but I have been taught that it is a duty to repress ill temper, instead of giving way to it."

"That is meant for me:—I understand:—and duty—that comes from our good aunt Emma, whose name you bear.—I hate preaching."

"And practice too?" asked his sister archly.

"I suppose you would say so."

"I would say nothing unkind, dear Robert."

"No, that you would not, Emma. I wish I could be as patient as you. But don't you comprehend that I am in a very ill humour this morning?"

"Oh, yes! I have no difficulty in understanding that. But what is the cause of this very unusual effect?"

"Why that girl to be sure!"

"What girl? whom do you mean?"

"Miss Clare,"

"Miss Clare!"

"Yes, Miss Clare! what other girl could I mean?"

"Oh! I thought you might have been outflirted by Miss Power."

"Outflirted! that is always the way with you women," replied her brother, his vexation increased by her observation. "A girl cannot smile—a man cannot laugh; but what you call it flirting, and think proper to lecture on decorum. You are all flirts at heart, though a want of opportunity, or a fear of—"the world's dread laugh!" may keep some demure".

"Allow me to thank you in the name of my sex;" replied Emma with a second and profounder courtesy. "That I may not offend

again, will you have the goodness to define what flirting really is ?”

“ Give a definition to a woman ! Why that would be throwing peaches to a monkey—pine apples to a hedge hog ! Ask a girl what she means, and she cries :—Mean ? oh ! I shall not be able to make you understand. We women are not good hands at definitions—we cannot define—we feel.”

Emma laughed.

“ Poor women ! we are all in the wrong this morning ; and Miss Clare’s offence I suppose, consists in her being a female.”

“ No such thing ! I have an especial hatred to Miss Clare ; and only wonder that you have not the same.”

“ Poor Miss Clare !”

“ Ah ! that is the very thing. Poor Miss Clare !—We have heard of nothing else for the last month. Every body and every thing must be displaced to make Miss Clare comfortable. She must have the little dressing-

room, where I used to sulk at my pleasure (the pleasantest room in the whole house, by the way) for her boudoir; and there has been no quiet in the house, what with hammering and scrubbing to give her clean floors, and clean curtains, I have been scolded for wearing creaking boots, lest they should annoy Miss Clare:—ordered to get a new coat and lay aside my favorite Dahlia one, for fear she should faint at the smell of a cigar, because I once chanced to smoke one, when wearing it: besides being lectured over and over again about manners:—not to laugh so loud—not to talk so much:—and this from my mother!—In fine, I have been told so many hundred times that she is a poor orphan, without father or mother (as if an orphan could have either) and that I must receive her as a friend—a sister—that I have been worked up into a positive horror of this dear, interesting girl, and regard her as an absolute incubus. And now, to crown all, she comes as a perfect kill

joy, with double bombazine, and treble crape ; jumping with nervous terror, which I dare say she thinks very bewitching, at the chirping of a grasshopper."

"Oh ! Robert how can you say so ? Think of her misfortunes ! Her emotion on first arriving—her gratitude for mamma's kind welcome—her pale, sad face—her evident weakness should have secured your pity."

"Pity ! don't talk to me of pity, and a pale, sad face. I hate pale, sad faces :—crying, and nervousness, and all that sort of thing. I shall not be allowed to whistle the dogs ; and the dogs will not be allowed to bark, for fear Miss Clare should jump. I wonder my mother did not put the whole family into mourning, bombazine and crape ; cats, kitchen maids and all. Pretty airs she will give herself."

"Airs dear Robert ! How can you say so ? She seems so gentle."

"Yes airs, Miss Emma. I know what I say ; but I see you are resolved to like her,

and that increases my ill humour. 'Do not trust to her seeming so gentle; she has been a spoilt child from her birth; eating gold—drinking diamonds—and reclining on *Lapus Lazuli*. Having her own way in all things, except when that way thwarted her father's, which was but rarely. There was not a young man in the whole city a fit match for her;—she might condescend to dance with a few, as otherwise she must have sat still, or stayed at home, and thus lost the opportunity of displaying her splendid jewels, and handsome dresses: but if one without a title, or a rent roll as long as a prosy gossip's story, ventured to hint his hopes—her papa looked *Lorenzo the Magnificent*, and she his own child."

"I have heard that Mr. Clare had a taste for splendour; and not wishing his daughter to marry any one connected with Liverpool discouraged her forming intimacies; but surely we may excuse a father's partiality, however

blind, for an only child, so lovely and so amiable."

"You excuse every one, Emma. Amiable!—ask Skinner about that;—he had a specimen of her airs, and her father's haughtiness."

"I doubt Mr. Skinner's being a very good judge of female manners."

"That is always the way with you girls, you never think a man can understand a woman, whereas we know your sex a great deal better than you do yourselves. And as for her loveliness!—commend me to a scraggy figure—goggle eyes, edged with a black rim—a complexion like a dab of dough—a turned up chin, and compressed lips, that bespeak a haughty temper."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried the laughing Emma, holding up her hands. "One would think that you were a rival beauty. You make no allowance for her late illness; and her chin is beautiful!—classical!—and—"

“ I have hated the classical ever since I was flogged for my Virgil,” exclaimed her brother, interrupting her. “ She is a downright fright compared to my sister Emma.”

“ Do not endeavour to coax me into a cabal against the stranger by flattery ; but rather suspend your own judgment.”

“ Not I ; Skinner’s account was enough for me, there is enmity between us now, and for ever.”

“ Stop, stop, Robert.”

“ And stop, stop, Emma ; those lips were made for kissing, not for scolding,” replied her brother, suiting the deed to the word. “ I know I am a very naughty boy ; but the fit is on me, and must have its way. I wish I could put some one else as much out of humour as myself. Ha ! there is Flinter. Holla, Flinter ! have you been over to see the harrow at Mrs. Praed’s ? I hear Frazer is doing wonders with it ; and your mistress is very

anxious that you should use it. Have you seen it?"

"No, Master Robert. I have not seed it: and what is more I don't intend to see it," replied Flinter surlily, catching ill humour from his young master, and setting his features as he always set them when particularly annoyed. "If missus chooses to have the harrow let her have it;—and another bailey too:—I hates new fangled things; and I hates furriners!"

"Ha! ha! ha! there is some one else in as bad a humour as Robert Ashton," exclaimed the wayward young man, as the vexed bailiff marched off in a huff.

"I shall be gone, lest I too catch ill temper from you, or a cold from this northern breeze," said Emma, turning towards the house to conceal her amusement at honest Flinter's discomforture, though half provoked with herself for laughing at it.

“Adieu then ; I shall go and flirt with Miss Power.”

Emma shook her head reprovably, but her brother only laughed at the silent admonition.

Whilst her son was venting his ill humour in abuse of poor Cecil, Mrs. Ashton was teasing her husband with a thousand questions concerning the same young lady, closing her queries and comments with the remark. “My dear, how ill you are looking. I am sure there is something the matter with you.”

“I am very tired,” replied Mr. Ashton, wearied with her countless questions ; and will go and lie down on the sofa in the study till dinner time.”

“Ay, do, my dear ; and I will come and see that you are comfortable.”

Poor Mr. Ashoton quitted the room with a look of passive despair ; but as his practice, if not his maxim, was any thing for a quiet life, (which said quiet life, by the way, he could

never obtain,) he made no objection to her proposal. Had Mr. Ashton been in parliament he would have always voted with the ayes whether whigs or tories;—he had no talent for opposition.

Mr. Robert Ashton returned to dinner, but the placidity of his temper seemed little increased by his flirtation with Miss Power; and his enmity towards the interesting stranger, as he called Cecil in derision, acquired fresh strength from her involuntary start at the noise occasioned by his awkwardly throwing down a chair; and his mother's fidgeting fuss about her comfort, by which she made herself and every one else uncomfortable.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning nothing would do but Mrs. Ashton must lionise poor Cecil in her pony chaise. "The drive would do her good—she could be wrapt up warm; and if Robert would walk by the side (they should not go fast) he could open the gates, and give her his arm if she felt inclined to walk for the purpose of obtaining a better view of the surrounding country;"—but Robert was particularly engaged and could not assist in the lionisation.

His hunter's mane and tail must be cut on that particular morning, and he must of necessity superintend the operation.

"Come, Robert, with all your prejudice you must admit the sweetness of the smile with which Cecil rewarded my care in tucking the cloak round her feet," observed Emma to her brother as they stood at the hall door after the departure of the pony chaise.

"Oh very sweet.

' Sugar and spice,
And all that's nice ;'—

replied her brother contemptuously.

"Who could look cross at you, Emmy? So you call her Cecil already."

"She begged me to do so. Miss Clare sounded so cold and formal she said: and as my father and mother had promised her the affection of parents, she hoped we should feel the regard of sisters."

"The regard of sisters! Very pretty and

romantic. I suppose she will beg me to call her Cecil next, and pet her as a brother."

"No chance of that; for you look as if you would devour her, were cannibalism permitted in a civilised country."

Robert laughed, and proceeded to the stables.

"Now, my dear, that I have shown you the farm and the village—that is a bird's eye view of them—we will just drive to that hill; and then I can show you all the gentleman's seats for many miles, round," said Mrs. Ashton, who was the most indefatigable sight shower in the whole county, though unluckily her zeal not being always combined with knowledge, her friendly efforts sometimes failed to elicit the gratitude they deserved. Somehow or other (we do not pretend to explain the phenomenon, but there are people who have a peculiar talent for such misapprehension) Mrs. Ashton always showed her friends just what they least wished to see; and omitted to point

out what they most desired to contemplate ; and so it had chanced throughout the morning whilst lionising Cecil. Miss Clare cared nothing about soils loamy, sandy, or chalky ; and as little about turnips, mangel wurzel, lucern, or rape ; nay she even had not a clear conception of the peculiar merits and distinctions of Tartarian oats and Talavera wheat, notwithstanding a long, and, of course, lucid description of their differences and perfections from her worthy hostess, who was shocked at her young guest's ignorance in all matters agricultural.

Cecil could and did admire the pretty cottages with their gay gardens, for autumn lingered on its way as though loath to destroy the bright summer flowers that still remained ; and the sports and laughter of the merry village children cheated her out of more than one smile ; but the fallow fields (and there were many to be seen in October) appeared to her the very antipodes of the beautiful and the

poetical, though enlivened by the cheerful whistle of the plough boy. The air came chill to her weakened frame, and having no desire for a second edition of the *Agricultural Magazine*, she hinted a desire to return home; but finding that her kind hostess had set her heart on showing her all the wonders visible from the top of Horseford Hill, she quitted the pony chaise at her desire, and toiled after her up the steep ascent with what speed and patience she could command.

“There, my dear Miss Clare! there is a view for you! See round for miles—peep into three counties; and catch a sight of fifteen village churches, and twenty three noblemen’s and gentlemen’s seats!—you do not often meet with such a view as that.”

“No indeed!” replied the panting, breathless Cecil, who had just gained the side of this never tiring lioniser.

“No, my dear: there are few views to compare with this even in England, and none out

of it. Look at those fine cows in that rich meadow to the right; and those as fine merinos on the downs before us; and see—there to the left, is a splendid view of the sea, which must be between fifty and sixty miles off. On a very clear day, with a very good telescope, you can sometimes catch the white sails of the vessels gleaming in the sunshine,” continued Mrs. Ashton, who loved her county as some people love their country.

Poor Cecil looked to the right—the left—and before her; and by dint of straining her eyes did at last discover some animals that she could fancy might be cows and sheep, and a straight white line far away in the distance that she could imagine might be the sea. The parts of the landscape which Mrs. Ashton pointed out might be the most agricultural, but they were decidedly the least picturesque and beautiful; and Cecil turning away from the more distant prospect with its large fields and rectangular hedgerows, which looked poor

and uninteresting in her eyes, gazed with pleasure on the nearer view, which, though not worthy of the appellation fine, was generally pretty, and in some parts rich and picturesque.

“ I always begin by pointing out the most distant objects first, just as one bows to strangers before one shakes hands with friends,” said Mrs. Ashton, who always acted the part of *cicerone con amore*. As a *valet de place* she would have been invaluable; but alas! for curious travellers, fate had doomed her to be mistress of Ashton Grove. “ Look out just by the sea—a little to the right; and you will perceive a tiny speck scarcely larger than a pin’s head:—there! in a line between those two oaks in Lord Lindmoor’s Park: well that is the tower of Stockhill church, fifty seven miles off as the crow flies—nearly a hundred by the road:—and such roads! I must speak the truth, though it is my own county, and say that the gentlemen are most supine. In vain

do I point out the badness of the roads:— nothing is done to mend them. Captain Wilder told them only the other day that their ways were very rough ; but they only laughed, as they always do when we try to set them right. Do you see that tower, my dear? No wonder you don't, for you are looking over Mrs. Praed's Park, instead of Lord Lindmoor's. There—just where my finger is. Don't you see now ?”

“ You are very kind, Mrs. Ashton, in taking such pains to make me see all the beauties of the neighbourhood ; but my eyes have been weak since my late illness, and the air is chilling,” replied poor Cecil, shivering in the wind that swept over the bleak hill. “ Suppose you only point out the houses and villages near, and defer naming those more distant to some future time,” she added, observing that her hostess looked vexed at her remark.

Mrs. Ashton not only looked, but felt vexed too, at this disinclination to be made acquainted

with the names of the fifteen churches, and three and twenty noblemen's and gentlemen's seats; but a glimpse at Cecil's pale and weary face banished her discontent, and she closed immediately with the proposal.

"Certainly, my dear; since such is your wish. I dare say your late illness has left you weak; but this bracing air will soon restore your strength; and then I will bring you here again. I will begin with Lord Barringham's, Holdish Park—there—out to the left:—that is only fifteen miles off by the high road. A large place, and some good land; but he thinks nothing of improvements, though immensely rich; indeed he is a dull, indolent man, who takes little interest in any thing; and his lady is like him, with nothing but her title to recommend her; and Lady Barbara Hetherton takes after her parents. The young men call her handsome; but she is no beauty of mine; no expression—no animation; says little, and that not worth hearing: but then being an

only daughter she will be enormously rich, all her mother's fortune being settled on her; so no wonder that the young men make a fuss about her. I hate your still life, for my part. Not that I know much of them to be sure; for the Countess says she cannot visit so far, and never called on me, though she is often at Lindmoor; but I have met the family at county balls and dinners and have seen nothing to make me regret her ladyship's decision. We speak when we meet; and that is all. She expects as a Countess to be made much of; but I am not a person to cringe to a title; and I suspect she has found that out. The only son, Viscount Hetherton, being under age there is no knowing what he may turn out."

Cecil saw that Mrs. Ashton was hurt at not having been visited by Lady Barringham; but she made no remark on the subject and that lady continued.

"Not far from us—there to the left—is Captain Wilder's estate; a pretty place now,

and improving every day. It was quite a desert when he came:—poor land—a poor house;—and he has made it what it is. He is a most delightful person: so quick, so lively, trying all the new inventions, and making a paradise spring out of a howling wilderness. This is the third place he has created as he says; but his quiet wife complains that when he has once made a place perfection he is for quitting it directly. Indeed there was some talk of his leaving Myrtle Lodge last year, and buying a tract of land at Exmoor; but there was a fire in the house, the masons say from one of his new flues; but then country masons are so ignorant and bigotted, always for going on in the old jog trot style—hating clever inventions, because they never saw them before; and generally causing them to fail from their awkwardness in putting them up. I really believe they do it out of spite; at least, I am sure they rejoice in a failure. Then before the house was quite completed down fell the

bridge. I cannot imagine how it happened ; for it was built on an entirely new principle of his own discovery ; and was a most elegant structure, looking, as he himself remarked, as light as a cobweb ;—quite a fancy bridge. To be sure, the first cart that went over was rather heavy ; but when he explained the plan —mutual support and all that sort of thing (I forget the technical terms) I thought it would have borne the Lord Mayor's coach and all the Aldermen, with a train of baggage waggons behind. The old village mason said it would not stand, so I daresay he took no pains in the building that his words might come true : and that is Captain Wilder's opinion. I must allow that he was generally there to superintend the workmen, and see all was done right ; but then, not being a mason himself, he could not exactly tell whether the bricks and workmanship were good. I wanted Mr. Ashton to have just such another bridge over our stream ; but my husband

never likes change or trouble. "The old bridge had done very well for many years: and he had no doubt would do very well for many more," was all I could get him to say. I think he triumphed a little when Captain Wilder's bridge fell in; he has such a dislike to any change; indeed, if it were not for me, Ashton Grove would go to ruin, for Flinter is more bigotted and self-willed than his master; but there was no cause for triumph;—you cannot expect a new discovery to come to perfection at once. The Captain's next bridge will stand I have no doubt. Mrs. Wilder is a quiet, peaceable woman who would willingly live on for years in the same room, in the same house, with the same furniture; breakfasting and dining off the same dishes, at the same hour, if her husband would only let her. A sweet woman! people say. I believe she is very amiable; but I don't think there is much in her. They have only one child, a fine spirited girl taking after her

father; not exactly handsome; but very pleasing and intelligent. There are some excellent rooms in the house, though rather oddly arranged. It was built after a plan of his own; for he is exceedingly clever: most of the chimnies smoke; but he will soon set that to rights. See what fine young plantations!—none so thriving in the whole county;—in twenty years those will be beautiful woods.”

“Whose is that stately, old fashioned looking house to the right, with its terrace and broad stone steps, leading down into the noble park?” asked Cecil, turning with indifference from the stripling trees and modern Lodge of Captain Wilder, having more taste for present than for future beauty.

“Oh! that is Lindmoor; the seat of the Earl of the same name. It is a fine old place certainly; but I only half like it either; it always seems to me asleep, or standing still. you understand what I mean. There is no look of life about it: but this may be ac-

counted for from the numerous deaths in the family of late years, and the Earl's generally residing elsewhere. He desires every thing to be kept in apple-pie order, and perhaps this love of order is why he never attempts an improvement. I do not think he would like the litter of brick and mortar: and there has not been a new room added to the house for the last century."

"It does not look as if another room could be wanted," remarked Cecil Clare.

"Perhaps not, for it contains many fine apartments, and handsomely furnished too I believe; but I have not been within the doors for ages. The Earl, when here, rarely admits any one but the Barringhams, not caring to mix with commoners; and the housekeeper is such an old frump that she will not show the house during his absence, though his lordship could never hear of her so doing. Still, as I said before, there is no look of life about it:—nothing moving—nothing going on."

“No building, and no young plantations certainly; and the steps and old oaks and beeches do not walk about; but stand where placed of yore,” said Cecil with a half smile.

“Yes; that is just the thing, Miss Clare.”

“But the trees are such fine old trees,” remarked Cecil who if she could not admire fallow fields and turnips, had a somewhat overweening affection for old houses and rich woods.

“Oh! you like old trees, do you? well now I prefer a fine young plantation. The green is so much brighter, and the year’s shoots so much longer; you can see it grow, as it were, like children shooting up all life and spirits instead of old people sitting still in the chimney corner, and making one melancholy by the thought of decay. Then those woods are so very thick and gloomy that the sun can scarcely glade between the branches even at mid-day; and the water runs so still and dark, with the trees dipping into it, that one can

hardly look down into its depths, without thinking of drowning oneself, instead of dancing along clear, and bright as at Captain Wilder's, where you can see the trout at play."

"Oh, beautiful!" cried Cecil, continuing to gaze on the noble park of Lindmoor. "I so love deep woods, and dark still water!"

"Then our tastes differ, Miss Clare. I hate every thing gloomy and still; but you are young: when my age you will prefer moving, lively scenes. Youth has so much gaiety of its own that it fancies melancholy things are very pretty for a contrast; but let it feel real suffering and it turns from gloom to gaiety for diversion."

Cecil shuddered as her eye rested on her mourning dress, whilst her thoughts recurred to her late heavy afflictions; but Mrs. Ashton, unconscious of her emotion, proceeded in a tone that jarred still worse on her sensitive feelings.

“ If you like Lindmoor so much, you had better play pretty to the Earl when he comes down ;—they say he made a very good husband to his first wife. At present he thinks only of his son, a boy of twelve, whom he hardly lets out of his sight, lest some harm should befall him. Having lost three elder children by consumption he is wrapt up in this only remaining one, and it is thought by some would not survive his loss. Should the young Viscount Fitz Elwyn follow his brothers, and the Earl die without other issue, the title, and some of the estates, will descend to a distant relative, whom his lordship dislikes ; so should any misfortune happen to his darling I have no doubt that Lord Lindmoor would marry again, in the hope of obtaining an heir. His property, as you see, joins ours ; but we were never intimate ; and the whole race I understand are as proud as the descendants of a city knight. That pretty cottage in the nook between the two estates is the vicarage. Mr.

Brockley is a most worthy man, just what a clergyman should be: so strict towards himself, so charitable towards others: the old esteem him, and the young love him; but his health, always delicate, and worse since the death of his wife, keeps him almost entirely at home, except when called abroad by duty. That belt of trees—there to the left, is the boundary of Mrs. Praed's estate; and there you can see the house, just peeping through the wood. It is a gentlemanly looking place; and that is all in my opinion. Mrs. Praed is made more fuss about than she deserves; but then a widow left uncontrolled mistress of a landed property of some thousands a year must be a person of consequence. She knows nothing about farming herself, but has a very clever bailiff of the name of Frazer, who has the best crops in the county. He is not above taking advice and trying new inventions, unlike Flinter, who is so obstinate that I can do nothing with him;

and poor dear Mr. Ashton is so indolent that he never will interfere. I really wish he would be a little more energetic ; but the only occasion on which he has acted promptly for years was his late journey to Liverpool ; and then I had to give directions to the post boys, or he would never have been in time for the coach at Dingley Hollow."

"I am truly grateful to you and to him," said Cecil warmly.

"You owe us nothing. I only did as I would be done by, thinking what I should suffer at the idea of leaving my own poor girls without a protector. I wish Mrs. Clare had been spared to come with you ; but that could not be : so you must look upon me as a mother. Get up your health and spirits again, and all will be well. But let me see :—I was telling you of Mrs. Praed. She has a clear income of three thousand a year, and no chick nor child to leave it to ; so people are all guessing who is to be her heir, and many say

Miss Knight, her elder brother's only child, who has resided with her for many years. With this prospect, as you may suppose, she is flattered and wooed by half the young men of the county, who find Mrs. Praed's a very pleasant house to visit at. But talking of gay young men, there is Mr. Fleetwood—the catch of the county—a bachelor of eight and twenty; handsome, pleasant, sensible: with a large rent roll—every chance of representing ——— shire at the next election, and with no prudent parents to control his choice. You will scarcely find such another neighbourhood as ours—such good society—so many independent fortunes; and though love is very pretty and all that, particularly in the honey moon, it will not provide a good table, keep a good stud, nor furnish a handsome house; even you must admit that, young as you are.”

“ Perhaps not :—but might not true affection enable one to live contented without a good

table, a fine stud, or a handsome house?" asked Cecil looking down as she spoke.

"It is possible that it might do so ; but it never does. You are romantic I see. Ay, I was so at your age ; it is a disorder incidental to youth, that passes away with the measles and hooping cough. Get rid of your romance, my dear Miss Clare, as soon as possible ; it will never advance you in the world I can assure you. Poetical notions butter no bread, nor even procure the bread to butter ; nay, poets themselves in the present day instead of being contented to live in garrets on bread and water as formerly, (thankful if they could get such board and lodging) are not satisfied now without a first floor, soup, fish, *entremets*, and pastry. Every one wants to cut a dash and be somebody ;—now a poor person must be nobody, and therefore, though it was all very well in our grandmothers' marrying for love (that is if they did it more than their grand-daughters,

of which I am by no means certain) it is a style of proceeding quite unfitted to modern times. Not that I would have a young woman marry solely from interested motives, only I would have her make a prudent choice. Now Mr. Fleetwood would be a good match for any one ; —so what say you, Miss Clare, to setting your cap at him ? He is expected shortly from abroad and you and Emma shall have a fair start, which is very liberal on my side ; for I should like such a son-in-law prodigiously : they say he is looking out for a wife.”

The sudden contraction of the brow—the haughty curling of the quivering lip, that met the gaze of the startled Mrs. Ashton, as she turned for an answer to her young companion, caused that lady to suspect that the report of Robert’s friend concerning Miss Clare’s pride was correct ; and she added half pettishly : “Oh ! I see this won’t do ; you require a title ; so Lord Lindmoor must be the man.”

“I require no title, but would remain as I am ;” replied Cecil Clare with a quickness and passion that to Mrs. Ashton’s judgment could only be explained by the aforesaid report.

“ Well, my dear, I did not mean to vex you by my jesting ; but how pale you are ;—and your teeth chattering. This north wind is too much for you ; I like it—it invigorates me ; but you are too weak from your late illness to endure its keenness. Take my arm my dear, to descend the hill, and we will drive home as fast as we can. I should have thought of this sooner,” said Mrs. Ashton with motherly kindness, forgetting in her pity for the shivering invalid all the reports of that invalid’s pride, though it did not prevent a little more display of her powers of lionizing. “ That is Captain Power’s cottage : you will see it better a little lower down ; but I have not much to say of him or his sister, except that he is a rattling

young officer on half pay ; and she an arrant flirt, whom some think pretty."

Cecil's soft voice and smile as she thanked Mrs. Ashton for her care throughout the drive, staggered that lady's belief in Mr. Skinner's evil reports.

"It was pain, not contempt that had caused the frown and scornful curl," was her thought, and when day after day, week after week passed on, and her young guest still showed herself gentle, grateful, and good tempered, Mr. Skinner was declared to be blind or malicious.

But if the mother acquitted Miss Clare of pride, not so her eldest son, at least in speech. He still maintained that she was not such a piece of perfection as his parents and sister asserted ; but he did not abuse her as loudly as on her first arrival, and was on many occasions studiously polite : perhaps the young lady herself only clearly understood the differ-

ence of his manner towards her and others. He would walk and talk with her—put on her cloak—carry her parasol—and turn the leaves of her music book; but his attentions to her wanted the warmth and frankness which he showed to some others of his sister's friends, and there were times when the jesting between Robert Ashton and Cecil Clare was tinged with a bitterness that threatened to turn sport into anger.

“She behaved ill to Skinner,” was his reply to Emma, when she one day hinted that he had been hard on her favorite Cecil.

“She is an orphan; and has no friends,” observed his sister pleadingly.

“She is not as destitute of friends as you imagine,” replied her brother, adding quickly, “you are a host in yourself, Emma.”

If Cecil felt anger at Robert's demeanour she never gave a hint of her vexation to Emma; who, being one of those happily con-

stituted persons, who generally see and believe as they wish, continued to praise her brother and friend to each other till she imagined them possessed with a mutual regard as great as she desired.

Cecil was decidedly worse for two or three days after her lionization on the summit of Horsford Hill; but subsequently her health and spirits gradually mended, either from the purity of the air without doors, the kindness experienced within, or a strong constitution and active mind; perhaps from these combined; and though she persisted in declining all society for the present, instead of being the doleful, moping creature that Robert had anticipated, she showed a quiet cheerfulness when in the family circle, with at times a sudden gleam of gaiety, that bespoke a naturally lively disposition.

If she had found Mrs. Ashton's *catalogue raisonné* of her neighbours rather tedious she

consoled herself with the idea that she should better understand those neighbours on a future introduction ; and should our readers have been equally wearied, we recommend to them a similar mode of consolation,

CHAPTER IV.

“MAY DAY come ! I scarcely knew that winter was gone ; it has passed so quickly,” exclaimed Emma Ashton, glancing from the window at a group of dancing girls without.

“May day amongst the Muses,” observed Cecil archly, looking towards Robert and his brother Edward who were, or appeared to be absorbed in studying—one Shakespeare, and the other Coleridge.

“May day amongst the Graces,” replied

Robert gaily, pointing to the dancers.

“Indeed! then I must take a peep, having a great taste for the Graces Emma says.”

“I should say that you had a greater taste for the talents, Cecil,” observed Edward Ashton, roused from his book by the general movement towards the window. “You prefer the inward man to the outward;—the intrinsically valuable to the worthlessly showy.”

“Thank you for giving me such a good character,” said Cecil, pleased with the compliment, for she and Edward were great allies.

“That is, you fancy she prefers a slovenly poet to a point device young gentleman,” replied Robert with a satirical smile, glancing at his brother’s dress which showed some symptoms of carelessness.

“Most assuredly! a poet slovenly, or not slovenly, before a merely well dressed gentleman,” remarked Cecil promptly, coming to the

succour of the shy and blushing Edward, who began hastily arranging his neckcloth.

“Ah ! Miss Clare, people never know themselves,” observed Robert, with a mocking sigh, speaking in the tone of mingled sport and satire in which his conversations with Cecil were generally carried on.

To casual observers the spirit of sport appeared to predominate, but to Cecil the satire was most apparent, and at times exceedingly annoying : and she had been long enough at Ashton Grove to understand that her praise of another was pretty sure to render her hostess’s eldest son caustic, if not bitter, in his jesting.

“That is unhappily a very general complaint,” she replied.

“The very reason why such an original young lady as Miss Clare should be free from the disorder. Her thoughts and opinions—her likings and dislikings, as I understand her, are not those of the vulgar herd ; she would scorn

to be classed with the respectable and commonplace."

"I am afraid to claim admission into the first class, lest you should deny my claim; but to the last you declared me to belong only last night, because I ventured to hint a preference of virtue to valour, notwithstanding my regard for heroes."

"What then? He must know little of your sex who could suppose it possible for a woman to remain the same for four and twenty hours."

"Nay, Robert; no scandal of the whole sex, because you chance to have a *demele* with one," interposed his laughing sister.

"You had better keep quiet Emma, and leave us to fight it out:—"

"She who will rush 'twixt sword and lance,
Of deadly wound must stand her chance."

"An awful warning! thanks for your bro-

therly counsel, conveyed in such heroic and original terms, instead of the vulgar old fashioned distich beginning :

“Those who in quarrels interpose”

I never suspected that you and Cecil were resolved on a combat *à l'outrance*.”

“You are the most simple and unsuspecting of mortals, Emma: such however is the case, so grant us a fair field and no favor. All that will be required of you will be to bind up the wounds of the vanquished.”

“I am glad that the combat is not positively to end in death,” observed Cecil gaily, and in perfect good humour, notwithstanding the slight frown on her opponent's brow.

“No: I shall be satisfied with an unconditional surrender, and a very humble appeal for mercy.”

“High laud to your generosity, most

valorous Knight ! But what I if refuse to surrender ? what if I make no appeal for mercy ?”

“ Then the *coup de grace* must be given ;—such is the invariable law of the lists.”

“ Then sharpen your dagger, for I make no appeal ;” exclaimed Cecil Clare with a sudden flashing of her dark, hazel eye in answer to his look of threatening defiance.

Robert gazed at the speaker admiringly for a moment, before he replied. The brilliant flush that had come up into her usually pale cheek, replacing for a time the bloom of health, which had never fully returned since her mother’s death, and the spirited attitude, with the slight curling of the exquisitely chiselled lip became her well. Neither look nor manner marred her womanly grace and softness : they only proved, half sportive as the defiance was, a native energy of character that no suffering could entirely subdue. Mr. Robert Ashton might have thought that they intimated the self-will of a petted child, and reputed heiress, whose

slightest fancy had for years been law ; but if such an idea entered his mind it lingered but an instant. She looked so lovely that he could not quarrel with the feeling which lent such unusual lustre to her eye.

“War is dangerous and expensive,” he observed, in an altered tone : “Suppose we proclaim a peace.”

“I should rejoice in such a proclamation, were I quite certain that on your part the peace would be more than a hollow truce.”

“Nay, if you doubt me, let it be war!” exclaimed Robert with real or pretended indignation :—his sister thought the latter.

“Just as you please : I am ready for either,” replied Cecil coldly.

“Let it be war then !—and now to begin. If you care not for gentlemanly dress or address, why excuse your dislike to my friend Skinner on the plea that he has neither?”

“My dislike to Mr. Skinner requires no

excuse : he has neither such a head nor heart as should win regard."

"You are severe. Would you be judged in the same spirit?" demanded Robert sharply.

"Heaven forefend!" exclaimed Cecil, colouring at the charge of severity, and laughing to hide a little consciousness. "I fear I do not judge Mr. Skinner charitably; but the blame must rest partly on yourself for always trying to compel me to like him. Name him no more, and I will say no ill of him."

"You mistake: I have no wish to compel you to like any one, though I may take up the cause of a friend a little too warmly; but you must admit that your accusation of his having neither the dress nor manners of a gentleman sounds rather strange from one who has just professed a contempt for the outward man, thinking only of his inward worth. You should not in justice blame him, though he had the clownish *blouse* and bow of a plough boy."

“It is you who mistake now, Mr. Robert Ashton. When I said that Mr. Skinner was not a gentleman, I did not allude to his outward fashion, as much as to his inward moulding. A plough-boy with *blouse* and rustic bow might chance to be a pleasanter companion.”

“Indeed! Will you favor me with the definition of a gentleman?”

“A real gentleman has a warm heart, a generous spirit, and an enlightened mind, feeling what is due to his maker, and his fellow men. Such a man will not be a coxcomb;—his bow may be wanting in grace; but vulgar or impertinent he cannot be.”

“I thank you in the name of myself and my friend, Miss Clare. You consider him then vulgar and impertinent; and merely because he requested the honor of an introduction to a young lady, who refused that request with a haughtiness worthy of an Empress; and loud enough to be heard by the

presumptuous applicant ; to say nothing of her subsequent *hauteur*."

" I was not aware of Mr. Skinner's being within hearing ; and am sorry he should have felt hurt at the fancied haughtiness of my refusal. Of my subsequent *hauteur* he has no right to complain, since he brought it on himself by persisting in an introduction to Miss Clare, to use his own words, the heiress of unbounded wealth. He would have preferred her money bags could he have procured them as partners."

" Oh ! then it was a matter of pique after all ! You were annoyed at the idea of his preferring your wealth to yourself. Here is the moral of the tale !"

" I consider Mr. Skinner's preference as any thing but an honor," replied Cecil proudly, a little irritated by her opponent's manner, which, to tell the truth, was irritating enough.

" All young ladies say that ; it is the regular

form of a woman's speech. But you blame Skinner too hardly for preferring substantial gold to fleeting beauty."

"It may be a very wise decision; and I leave you, or any one else who has patience or philosophy enough for the attempt, to prove its wisdom."

"I boast of neither patience nor philosophy; and only uphold his right to acquire your acquaintance after your introduction to a vulgar, ignorant hunch-back, who had no attractions to boast of within or without except a title. I think he showed bad taste in entering into a competition with his puissant lordship; but that is a mere matter of opinion. I should have been more inclined to follow Fleetwood's example (to whom I believe you declined an introduction at the same time) and left the field to the estimable and gentlemanly nunch-back. And is this, really and truly, the whole and sole cause of your dislike to Skinner?"

Cecil's eyes sank beneath the penetrating gaze of the questioner, whilst her cheeks flushed to a deeper crimson, then paled to a deadly white, as the events of the ball at which Skinner's introduction had taken place rushed back upon her mind. Then she had been in the highest health and spirits;—radiant in beauty—rich in hope—the reputed heiress of almost countless wealth;—flattered—courted;—her wishes law—her will consulted in all the arrangements of the night;—and more, far more to her affectionate heart, the treasured child of doting parents. What was she now? Faded in health and beauty;—blighted in heart—bankrupt in hopes;—if not despised, yet still not sought;—a beggar—and an orphan! The white lip quivered for an instant—the hands were clasped;—then, checking her emotion with a strong effort, she answered briefly and coldly, conscious of her inability to continue the war of words, so vanquished was she by the war of contending feelings.

“Mr. Fleetwood’s was in my opinion the more gentlemanly mode of proceeding. Lord Semmington was introduced without my wishes on the subject having been consulted;—but I have not yet attained sufficient strength to venture on a recurrence to the past, so let us choose some other field for our combat.”

“I have pained you. Can you forgive me?” exclaimed Robert earnestly, with a sudden and entire change of manner.

“Readily—most readily! I owe you all so much,” replied Cecil warmly giving him her hand with friendly frankness, which was taken with an eagerness which again called up a transient blush into the cheek of the invalid.

A burst of laughter from Emma and Edward, whose attention for the last few minutes had been fully occupied with the May-day children, and a call on Cecil and Robert to look out at the dancers, prevented any further conversation between the two latter.

“Capital! this beats the ballet! Go it

Ned !” cried the highly amused Robert, throwing up the window and thus encouraging a little sweep with brush and pan, and a wreath of red roses round his sooty brow, to out-shuffle and out-caper his partner, a village maiden with streaming ribbons ; and a face as merry but somewhat cleaner than his own.

The children, excited by the applause of the young men and the smiles of the young ladies, out-did all their former feats, till, panting and breathless, they were obliged to stop from sheer fatigue ; when the throwing of ‘four silver shillings,’ as the little sweep exclaimed in an ecstasy, into the treasurer’s tin canister crowned their glee, and so far renovated their strength that they were on the point of recommencing their dance, when Mrs. Ashton’s appearance turned their intended shuffles into courtesies.

“ Hey day ! What all the village come out for a dance instead of being at school ?” began Mrs. Ashton in a reproving tone, that softened

into sympathy, as she proceeded, with the glee of the garland bearers and their capering attendants. “Ah well! May-day only comes once a year, so I suppose I must not scold. You dance famously children. Thank you for your good wishes; and may you long have such merry hearts,” she continued in reply to the May-day congratulations of the eldest girl, who was pushed forward as spokeswoman by the awkward, shame faced boys. “Here is something to buy you new shoes; for you will certainly want them if you go on at that rate. But you are as rich as jews already!” she exclaimed, espying the shillings given by the laughing group at the window, as she dropped her own offering into the tin canister. “What do you intend to do with all this money?”

The children looked at her—at each other—and then on the ground;—grew redder and redder—nudged their neighbours to give answers; and tittered—but said never a word.

readily as though there had never been any thing but peace between them ; whilst Edward and Emma followed in their wake.

If Robert had thought Cecil lovely in her indignation, he thought her still more bewitching in her present friendly mood ; and did the honors of the luncheon table with the assiduity of one desirous of effacing all remembrance of a former slight.

“ What not done luncheon yet ? ” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, entering the room before the ham and chicken were quite demolished. “ Really, my dear, you should better divide the time between breakfast and dinner ; you know Dr. Farr ordered you to eat often,” continued the lady of the mansion, addressing her quiet husband. “ And dear me, Mr. Ashton, going to take pastry in the middle of the day, when you know that Doctor Farr said it was the worst thing you could eat, so heavy, so indigestible ! It is little short of suicide.”

"It will do me no harm," replied Mr. Ashton helping himself with the greatest composure.

"That is just like you, my dear; you never will take care of yourself. Good gracious, Robert! you are not persuading Cecil to take any of that cream. It will be absolute murder in her delicate state."

"It will do her no harm," replied her son, imitating his father's imperturbable placidity, and handing the plate to Cecil with a very demure look. "Shall I help you to some ham, mamma? It is a capital specimen of Hanson's powers; and your instructions. Do let me send you some?"

"You may give me a little piece. I thought the hams would turn out well this year," replied Mrs. Ashton, forgetting, in her pleasure at this household success, that tart and cream must infallibly cause the death of her guest and husband. "Only a small piece, Robert, for I was obliged to try Mrs. Hopford's cake, good

observed her laughing son: "but in pity to my anxiety, inform me who is dead."

"It is more than you deserve," said his mother, half provoked at his teasing; "but you are incorrigible! It is not Suky Flukes who is dead, but the Earl of Lindmoor, and his son, Viscount Fitz Elwyn."

"How? where? when?" enquired Robert, Edward, and Emma, in a breath.

"As for the how—the viscount was thrown from his pony and killed on the spot. You remember the brown pony that Lord Lindmoor would let none of the grooms mount lest they should teach it tricks—well it was that very pony. They say the animal took fright at something and ran away. The earl being told of his son's death too suddenly, dropped down in a fit:—he lived four and twenty hours after; but only spoke one word—the name of his child. This is the how:—the where was at his lordship's villa near Nice:—the when, about a fortnight since, though, owing to the

irregularity of foreign mails, the event was not known here till yesterday. Poor man ! that comes of being over careful, which shows a distrust of Providence : he would scarcely let the boy out of his sight ; so the viscount grew up too timid and nervous to cope with difficulties."

"Who succeeds to the title?"

"A distant relative : Mr. Fitz Elwyn."

"What the Mr. Fitz Elwyn who came with the Barringham's to the county ball last year?"

"The same."

"Let me see ! I think there was a son who declined dancing, and flirted all the evening with Lady Barbara, to her mother's discontent. I did not much fancy the young man, I remember ; and Skinner said he was inclined to give himself airs. He brushed by me very rudely going into the supper room."

"But then he turned and apologised very politely, saying that he was pushed by those behind," observed his sister, "Ah, Emma, you

have a kind word for every one ; but I remember I did not fancy him ; and he is just the sort of person whom a title would make positively disagreeable ; the whole family were poor I think they said, and the young man in the army."

"The father I understand has six hundred a year, and the son about four, the bequest of one of his sponsors, besides his pay, and they will scarcely be much richer in proportion now, for Mr. Tuson, who made the late earl's will after the death of his second son, tells me that the present Lord Lindmoor will only come into the entailed estates ; which, as we know, are expensive to keep up and not very productive. The house in Gloucestershire, and all his other possessions are left to Mr. Hallam, a particular friend," replied Mrs. Ashton.

"This is hard. The earl should have left his heir wherewith to support the title."

"He should ; but the earl never liked the Fitz Elwyns, particularly after the death of his

two eldest children: he appeared envious of his cousin's son growing up such a fine young man, whilst his own had pined away with consumption; and as Mr. Fitz Elwyn was of too independent a spirit to crouch to a title his lordship's dislike grew into absolute hatred; and but for the entail, his heir would not have had one shilling to maintain his rank.

"Earls cannot be the great men they used to be; and must learn to eat off china like commoners. Lords are too numerous now a days to be looked on as demigods," observed her son, who had been refused permission to fish by Lord Lindmoor, declined as a partner by Lady Barbara Hetherton, and accidentally pushed by young Fitz Elwyn, against whom he appeared to have taken an invincible dislike.

"I hope you are not going to turn radical, Robert," said his mother sharply. "To be sure" (a favorite expression with Mrs. Ashton) "the late Lord Lindmoor and Lord Barringham have not shewn themselves very gracious

and neighbourly ; but I dare say we shall be very good friends with the present earl ; at any rate, the aristocracy must be upheld in the present day, when the lower classes are getting above themselves ; and it is very wrong and very impolitic to cry them down."

"Hear ! hear ! hear ! why, my dear mother, you shall come in for a tory borough ; or be created a peeress in your own right to uphold the merits of the order.

"What a commoner says may be good,
But the speech of a lord must be better :—
A peasant may stumble on truth,
But an earl must be right to the letter."

"You are a very strange person, Robert ; and there is never any guessing what you will say next, or what humour you may be in for three minutes together : one hour so frank and light hearted, the next so bitter and gloomy, just as the fancy takes you. You were upholding the nobility only the other day ; but, as

Captain Wilder says, there is no knowing where to have you."

"That is a wise remark for Captain Wilder," replied her eldest son.

"No one can doubt Captain Wilder's being a clever man," remarked Edward with unusual quickness; for he had some of his father's quietude.

"As particularly exemplified in building houses and bridges," returned Robert drily.

"Accidents will happen to the works of the best architects," observed Edward with a considerable show of vexation.

"Certainly: for instance, if an architect constructs a bridge without sufficient supports, the arches will fall in, either from the law of gravitation—or the law of accidents."

"How can you prove that not having sufficient support was the reason of the bridge's breaking down?" questioned his mother.

"Every body says so; and, of course, what every body says must be correct; at any rate

it will be good practice for your ingenuity to prove the contrary. For my part I think proving and defending such tiresome work that I always make a rule of saying what I like, and believing what I wish."

"That is a very dangerous mode of conduct. Do not you think so, my dear?" said Mrs. Ashton, appealing to her husband.

"Think what, my dear?" asked her very quiet helpmate, glancing up at her appeal from the newspaper, in the perusal of which he had been so absorbed as to lose the greater part of the preceding conversation.

"It is of no use to ask you a question—you never attend to what is passing around you," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton pettishly, whilst Robert laughed, and the silent master of the mansion resumed his reading with unruffled temper.

"There, my dear mamma; that comes of trying to prove me in the wrong. If you had followed my plan and contented yourself with

believing me in error, instead of endeavouring to prove it, I should not have had this triumph. Trust me that by the logic of the schools you might prove a fool to be a sage, and vice versa, at any hour of the day," said Robert gaily.

"No logic could prove Captain Wilder a fool," remarked Edward warmly.

"Nor his daughter a disagreeable fright, I suppose. You are a staunch follower of his doctrine of mutual support I perceive," observed Robert with a significant look, which effectually silenced his blushing opponent.

"Do tell us some more of the new earl and his family, our nearest neighbours that are to be," said Emma, ever ready to interpose and prevent a *brouillerie*.

"And pleasant neighbours I trust too," remarked her mother.

"That is as it may be," observed Robert in a tone which rather said—that is as it will not be. "I have no fancy for any of the family; they were high and mighty without a title, and

will be still more high and mighty with one : as for Viscount Fitz Elwyn, I proclaim open war against him at once."

"It is very provoking of you to speak in that way, Robert ; and once having taken such a fancy into your head you will be sure to make yourself exceedingly disagreeable. I dare say it will be a very nice house to visit at : the viscount seemed a pleasant, gentlemanly young man."

"I hate your gentlemanly young men ; they always think more of the make of their coats than the make of their minds ; and are more famed for their bow than their wit. Is it not so?" said Robert, appealing to Cecil, who was, however, too much engaged at the moment with the cream to which he had helped her to return an answer.

For an instant his eye rested keenly on her ; then, without waiting for a reply, he recommenced tormenting his mother, one of his favorite amusements, notwithstanding the

affection with which he really regarded her.

“Ah, my very prudent mamma, I see how it is:—

‘Your eye intent
Is on the visioned future bent.’

When you have won this delectable viscount for Emma, like a good brother, ‘I will turn about, and wheel about, and jump Jim Crow,’ declaring him to be a pleasant, gentlemanly young man—and what not.”

“For shame, Robert,” exclaimed his mother, coloring with anger. “You know that I am no matchmaker for my daughters and would do nothing indelicate to procure them husbands.”

“I wish you would employ the same forbearance towards your sons; and then I should be spared many a lecture matrimonial; but I will do you the justice to say that your matching or mismatching schemes include the whole human race; and that you are nearly as zealous, and have nearly as much pleasure

in promoting the wedding of a stranger as of one of your own family. You are a universal philanthropist or matrimonialist, which, of course, means the same thing. Take care Miss Clare, or my active, warm-hearted mother, in her sincere regard for you, will be promoting love passages between you and Lord Fitz Elwyn."

"How can you talk such nonsense Robert? the viscount is already engaged;" observed his mother quickly before Cecil could reply.

"Engaged to whom?" cried Robert eagerly, his words addressed to his mother, but his looks turned on Cecil.

"To Lady Barbara Hetherton. Lord Baringham objected to his suit last year, he being then only a poor commoner, but has now consented to receive him as a son-in-law; and the Lindmoors are delighted at the match, since the bride will inherit her mother's fortune of fifty thousand pounds besides what her father may give her, which will be a pretty assistance in keeping up the title."

“Is this engagement a positive fact?” asked her son with serious earnestness.

“A positive fact : I had it from Tuson.”

“What have you dropped Cecil? can I find it for you?” asked Emma stooping to assist her friend who was hunting for something which did not appear to be forthcoming, whilst Robert looked on without offering any assistance.

“What have you lost?” asked Emma again, seeing nothing on the floor but a few crumbs.

“My handkerchief—oh! here it is”—replied Cecil, taking it from her lap, whence it had never fallen, using it so as to conceal her face, which had suddenly become of a crimson hue, doubtless from the stooping.

“But how can all this have been settled so soon, when the earl and his son have only been dead a fortnight?”

“That is just what I asked, Emma,” replied her mother. “It seems that Mr. Fitz Elwyn and his son were at Holdfish Park when the news arrived, so the young people being to-

gether the affair was soon settled between them and their parents."

"How very happy for them!" said Emma, who had a warm sympathy for all loving young couples, though quite free of heart herself.

"If the mamma makes matches, the daughter rejoices in them without considering that each fresh youth entangled is a chance less for herself," remarked Robert laughing at his sister's earnestness.

"I hope I shall never grow so selfish as to envy another's happiness," said Emma warmly.

"You cannot be selfish, Emmy; it is not in your nature. So this is the wedding!—but when is it to take place?"

"Not till after the funeral," replied his mother gravely.

"I suppose not. But when and where is that to be? I am mamma's own child in my taste for gossiping."

"You are a very impudent boy;" said his

mother unable to repress a smile at the curious, comical look he assumed to bear out his assertion. The funeral is to take place immediately, in fact must have taken place already, as the earl and his son are to be buried at Nice, beside the other children who died some years ago. The wedding, it is said, will be celebrated in three or four months."

"And when will the new earl take possession of Lindmoor?"

"Very shortly it is believed, for the house-keeper has received orders to get the house in readiness directly. Mrs. Fitz Elwyn, I beg her pardon, Lady Lindmoor I should say, is now in Devonshire with her sister-in-law Mrs. Hartley, who is dangerously ill; and may be detained there some time; but the viscount is expected within the week."

"I wish he would keep away:—do not you Miss Clare?"

"Nonsense, Robert, How can you ask such silly questions? What can it matter to Cecil

walk ; but the day was so fine I could not make up my mind to come in. Having done the mischief, I will now play prudent and lie down till dinner time."

"And I will come and put you to bed. I warned you that the walk would be too long," said Emma passing her arm round the invalid's waist to support her up stairs.

"Your spirits carry you beyond your strength : I must look to this," observed Mrs. Ashton handing her a glass of wine, which she insisted on her drinking, "I suspect you require change of air. If you do not improve in a day or two, sorry as I shall be to part with you, I shall insist on your accepting your cousin's invitation to join her at Milford. Get a colour or you shall certainly be packed off for some sea breezes to Mrs. Ford ; I give you fair warning, mind."

"And good advice too, I believe," replied Cecil in a hollow tone, as she left the room leaning on Emma for support.

Edward not only opened the door but drew Cecil's disengaged arm within his, showing a brother's kindness, whilst Robert stood moodily aloof and soon after set off for a solitary walk, choosing the least frequented paths.

their neighbours ; and she made such a point of Cecil's appearing, according to a previous promise to mix more in society, that the grateful girl, having ascertained that these six consisted of the Wilders, Mrs. Praed, her niece, and an elderly gentleman staying with her, consented to please her kind hearted hostess. None of those invited were strangers, for though the state of Cecil's health and spirits had hitherto furnished a sufficient plea for her neither dining out, nor forming one in Mrs. Ashton's large parties, she had seen most of the neighbours in morning visits; and those expected more frequently than any others from their residing nearer.

"I hope you will not worry Cecil this evening," said Mrs. Ashton meeting her eldest son in the passage as he was going to dress for dinner. "She looks wretchedly ill; and is in a very delicate state."

"She looks ill enough; but I might say just the same to you about worrying her," re-

plied her son who chanced to be in one of his worst tempers. "You have wearied her and every one else talking of nothing but Viscount Fitz Elwyn ever since his accession to the title."

"Well, it is very provoking! day after day has he been expected, yet is not come now."

"All the better should he never come!" exclaimed her son.

"It is very tiresome, Robert, that you should have taken such a dislike to the viscount; and very extraordinary too."

"Not at all extraordinary, my dear mother; you know I always hate those people you worry me about by lauding to the skies."

"You are always so provoking, Robert. Cecil never cares of whom I talk; but listens with patience and good humour;—I wish you would take example by her."

"Thank you, my good mamma; but I am out of the nursery now, and not to be piqued into being a good boy through emulation,

which said emulation, by the way, generally degenerates into vanity on one side, and jealousy and dislike on the other. Moreover, I would wager my best hunter, and stake my talent for penetration on the fact; that Miss Clare, despite the gentle demeanour which you praise so extravagantly, has a depth of pride and passion in her character, which you have never fathomed."

"That is just what you said when she first came; yet from October to May I have seen no symptom of it; except a look indeed when I proposed her setting her cap at Mr. Fleetwood; and, by the bye, it is just about him that I wish to speak with you. I had a note from Mrs. Praed this morning to say that her visitor being laid up with the gout could not keep his engagement with me; and chancing to meet Mr. Fleetwood, just after, I asked him to fill the vacant seat. He seemed delighted at the invitation, and promised to come, though he only returned from abroad last night; and

had to ride back to dress, and then come over eight miles."

"Does Fleetwood really dine here?" questioned her son with sudden animation.

"I have just told you so; and I want to know what to do about Cecil. I am afraid she will be vexed whether I tell her first or not, for she always looks grave when he is named; and Mr. Skinner said something about her having refused to be introduced to him at a ball at Liverpool—did not he? I am half sorry now that I asked him; but he seemed so glad to see me, that I thought I could not do less."

"Never fret yourself about Fleetwood's dining here, my dear mother; I will manage it all between him and Cecil, only say nothing to her, and the blame of inviting him may rest on me if you choose; though she must have known that he would visit here on his return, as a matter of course."

"Yes, but poorly as she is, she may be upset at meeting a stranger, and one she does

not fancy. Had not I better introduce him on his first entrance?"

"No, no, my dear mother; attend to your other guests, and leave Fleetwood and Miss Clare to me; I will manage it all as it should be."

"Thank you, Robert, I wish you would always be so considerate."

The young man's smile was grim as he turned away.

"And, Robert," said his mother coming a step or two after him, "could not you be a little more civil to Mrs. Praed and her niece? You know how much I esteem them; and yet you are sometimes absolutely rude to Miss Knight."

"Hang Miss Knight!" exclaimed her irritated son, slamming his bed room door behind him, and muttering as he did so: "I shall be obliged to marry Miss Power to establish my right to freedom of choice. My mother will scallop every body's oysters after her fashion,

whereas I like mine scalloped after a fashion of my own. I do believe I am a very selfish person, and undutiful son," he added after a pause.

Poor Mrs. Ashton held up her hands in dismay at his sudden violence ; then retired to her own room to dress, after changing the purple waistcoat laid out for her husband for a black one with a small gold sprig, an exchange which he either did not remark, or did not care to disturb.

Cecil was seated in the drawing room before the arrival of any of the guests ; and Robert secured and retained a station near her after all those guests save one had arrived. At last the door opened for the third time, and Mr. Fleetwood was announced.

Robert's eye was on Cecil as that gentleman entered. She started—looked up with a flushed cheek, as if to ascertain the truth of the announcement, then down on the ground.

When next she raised her eyes her cheek

was as pale, if not paler than before; and her manner composed.

“Miss Clare, allow me to introduce Mr. Fleetwood,” said Robert, leading that gentleman towards her, as soon as he had paid his *devoirs* to the rest of the company.

Cecil's bow was coldly polite; Mr. Fleetwood's manner, from surprise at the unexpected introduction, for he had understood that she never appeared but in the family circle, was slightly embarrassed; whilst hers was perfectly calm and self-possessed. By Robert's contrivance Mr. Fleetwood was Cecil's neighbour at dinner; and by his own choice her neighbour after dinner. If he had ever felt any resentment at her declining an introduction it was evident that such resentment was now effaced by pity for her loss of spirits, health, and fortune; a pity mingled with admiration for her elegant manners, and the charms that lingered still despite her illness.

Robert Ashton allowed them to converse undisturbed; and neither guessed with what curious eyes he watched the progress of their acquaintance.

“What is this extraordinary new machine that you are expecting from Germany?” asked Mrs. Ashton of Captain Wilder, whilst the gentlemen were taking their tea.

“A very clever, ingenious thing, my dear madam. It goes on two wheels and can be used by a boy. As it passes along, it makes a furrow, drills holes, puts in cabbage or celery plants, treads them round, and waters them afterwards; or any other part of the garden to which the spout may be turned.”

“Very clever indeed!” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton in an ecstasy. “What is the name and price; and where is it to be procured?”

“It is called the *Pferdknabewasserunger*. The talented inventor is going to take out a patent in England; and the price I hear is to be fifteen guineas. Knowing my taste for

mechanics, Professor Schnurpfeiferey has written to request me to patronise it, offering to send me an engine at cost price."

"How delightful! we shall be able to do with half the men in the garden. *Furnabwass*—what do you call it Captain Wilder? There is no pronouncing those German names."

"I cannot well manage it myself;—' But what's in a name?' "

"Don't you think it could be made on a larger scale to answer for the farm, to plant potatoes—and reap—and other things?"

"I have not a doubt of it; and will send a hint to the inventor, Mrs. Ashton."

"The worst of it is, that I shall never get Flintor to use it; he is so obstinate: and Mr. Ashton never will interfere with him."

"So perfect a machine must overcome even his obstinacy," remarked Robert gravely. "But you do not seem to have heard of the improvement on this invention. Besides doing all that you have said, a sort of scythe comes out at

the side and cuts asparagus, whilst another contrivance binds them up in bundles for the market; in hundreds, or half hundreds according as it is set."

"I never heard of that," said Captain Wilder half vexed at another's hearing of a new invention before himself. "At least I do not think it was mentioned in Professor Schnurpfeiferey's letter. Was it Helen?" he asked turning to his daughter, who was ostensibly looking over some prints; but in reality watching Mr. Edward Ashton, who was on the opposite side of the room engaged in a seemingly interesting conversation with Miss Knight.

"I do not remember," replied Helen, looking very much as if she had not understood the question, though she answered intelligibly.

"It is very odd, Helen, that you should not remember, when you and Edward were helping me to make out the plan only this morning."

"And it is still odder that Edward should

not have said one word to me about it, or named his having been with you to-day," remarked his mother. "But he takes after his father and never speaks when he can help it. What sort of a looking thing is this machine?"

"I will try and show you; but I must call Edward to assist me."

"I do not think Edward will thank you for so doing: he seems most agreeably employed just now," observed Mrs. Leir, with a significant glance towards the young man, who was still engaged with Miss Knight. "I see love in the bud, which will soon expand into a full blown flower, if I do not mistake. What say you, Mrs. Wilder?" continued Mrs. Leir, who had as great a talent as Mrs. Ashton for discovering matches, if not for making them.

"It does look like it," replied quiet, lady-like Mrs. Wilder, meeting Mrs. Leir's sly smile with involuntary gravity; and as involuntary a glance at her daughter, who instantly began a conversation with Robert, carrying it

on with more than her usual animation and spirit, being ably seconded by him; so ably as to attract the attention of the whole room, including Edward and Miss Knight, who paused for some moments to listen to their war of words; then, as if by mutual sympathy, sought to outdo them in lively repartee: and if talking fast without any very great regard to the sense of what they uttered would have entitled them to the prize they would have won it.

“And there seems another budding *tendresse*!” continued Mrs. Leir, proud of her penetration, pointing towards Mr. Fleetwood, who was still by Cecil’s side, doing his best to interest her and apparently with success; indeed, Mr. Fleetwood was a young man who, if he set himself to please a lady, which however he rarely did, could scarcely strive in vain.

To a prepossessing exterior he added gentlemanly manners, a kind heart, and an intelligent and well-stored mind, all of which Cecil

was able to appreciate. Moreover, there was a pointed attention and gentleness in his conduct towards her which could not fail to be flattering and touching, as showing his pity for the losses which had so worn heart and frame.

“ I hope it may be so,” replied Mrs. Ashton, “ for I love Cecil next to my own children. It will be an excellent match for her ; but pray do not give her a hint on the subject, for she is particularly sensitive to any raillery on such points and even a smile would make her cold and formal.”

“ I would not say a word on any account,” said Mrs. Leir, with a very determined look of prudence and secrecy, a prudence and secrecy absolutely maintained till the middle of her next day’s journey, when Cecil’s manner of receiving her sly hint checked further jesting.

“ I have the vision of a third wedding, my dear Mrs. Ashton. Let me congratulate you !”

remarked Mrs. Leir later in the evening, glancing towards Robert and Miss Wilder who still continued talking with great animation. "What a match-making house yours is! I shall run away at once lest, old woman as I am, I should become entangled too. What do you do to persuade the young men to marry?—for I hear all other mammas complaining that the youth of the present day shun matrimony as a cat shuns wet."

"I bring the young people together—let them do as they please—give them a little good advice; and the rest they manage themselves. I always looked out Miss Knight for Robert; and as for Edward he is so quiet that I never counted on his falling in love; but they have settled it differently among themselves, and so it must be."

"Three weddings will make a great bustle," said Mrs. Leir.

"Indeed they will; and it will all fall on me for my husband never troubles himself about

any thing ;” replied Mrs. Ashton in glee at the bare idea, though pretending to deprecate the fuss.

And thus did these two ladies of active imaginations settle three weddings in one evening, only leaving poor Emma a chance of single blessedness from the simple and unfortunate fact of there not being any other bachelor present to whom they could devote her. How many of these anticipated weddings would really come to pass, time, and time only could reveal.

“It is very tiresome that I cannot make out the exact mechanism of the *Pferdknabewasserunger*” cried Captain Wilder in vexation, after having tried in vain to draw it for Mrs. Ashton’s gratification. “You must come over to Myrtle Lodge—I have it there; Edward drew it out for me this morning; and could tell me in a moment; but you won’t let me summon him.”

“I will certainly call on you to-morrow: Edward is engaged with Miss Knight at present.”

“Not to her, I hope; for the moment a young man gets love into his head there is no getting any thing else out of it; and I do not know what I shall do without Edward he is such an excellent engineer and architect; and helps me so much in all my plans. Had I sooner found out his merits on these points, I think we two should have been an over match for the masons and made the bridge perfect at once.”

“Yes, he has a great taste for architecture, and indeed was educated principally with a view of getting on in that line; but he seems more inclined to remain at home and do nothing. Mr. Ashton does not stir in the matter—he never will move in any thing; so here he sits reading or drawing all day long; or else lying down somewhere about in the woods, thinking of no earthly thing that I can make out.”

“His being in love might account for that,” observed Captain Wilder, but not as if pleased with the supposition.

“ Ah ! so it might : I never thought of that. Some people are so odd when they fall in love—I was not so.”

“ Nor I, Mrs. Ashton ; but then all have not such active minds. Do you know, I have just decided on changing the arrangement of the flower garden, and turning the gravel walk that leads by the rustic arbour.”

“ Had not you better wait till the autumn, my dear. This is a bad season for moving flowers ; and ours give such a rich promise of summer beauty ; and the garden was so much admired last year,” observed his amiable, quiet wife, whose natural love of neatness and horror of a mess made her little short of a martyr to her restless husband’s taste for change.

“ Do not ask me to wait, my dear ; I never could wait in all my life—not even for you. If your friends had persisted in their proposed delay, I do verily believe I should have run off with some one else.”

“ Should you ?” said his wife with a placid

smile, which spoke her confidence in his affection.

“I dare say I should, my dear, notwithstanding your security; at any rate, I must alter the garden at once: some people may have admired it, but I am no longer satisfied, and must make it perfection.”

“And then leave Myrtle Lodge as you did Sturton Priory,” remarked his wife, though with little hope of turning him from his dreaded purpose. “Alterations make such a litter about a house; there is no keeping any thing in order.”

“Why, my dear, you think more of an upturned gravel path, than of an overturned monarchy: and I do verily believe, if you were going to be beheaded, that your principal care would be about catching the blood, so that it might not make a mess and spoil your gown.”

“Oh! Captain Wilder; how can you talk of such things?” exclaimed Mesdames Leir and

Ashton in a breath, though unable to help laughing at his odd idea.

“My wife knows that I do not want to get rid of her ; but I do wish she had a little more taste for improvements.”

“I am afraid you must put up with me as I am,” replied his lady with a smile so sweet, and trustful, that Captain Wilder admitted in his heart that it was perfect, and had no desire to improve it.

“I will get the alterations finished as fast as I can—make as little mess as possible ; and take especial care of all your favorite flowers, my dear. But I do not know how I shall get on without Edward, he is so clever with plans and expedients ; and Helen is never so giddy when he is present. But I suppose he will be always at Ryworth now.”

“There is nothing settled ; in fact, I had not a suspicion of it before this evening ; and I must beg of you not to give a hint till Mrs.

Praed has been spoken to in proper form," said Mrs. Ashton, satisfied in her own mind that Miss Knight would infallibly become the wife of her second son at some future time ; never considering that Mrs. Praed might not think a younger son a sufficiently good match for her niece, the probable heiress of many thousands.

Mrs. Ashton, as we have already seen, was apt to jump at a conclusion ; and being a bold and reckless jumper sometimes overleapt the truth ; no breadth, depth, or height of leap could daunt her.

"Could not Robert do as well?" she suggested to console Captain Wilder.

"Robert ! he knows nothing of architecture, and laying out grounds, or any thing of the sort. Then he is so odd that I never can tell whether he is in jest or in earnest ; giving good advice or trying to hoax me. He may do very well to talk nonsense with Helen—by the way,

I wonder what the girl has got in her head to flirt so with him this evening—but as for building a house, or laying out a garden, if his friends depended on that they would have to live in log huts surrounded by deserts.”

“ I dare say Edward can spare you some little time ;” said Mrs. Ashton, anxious to propitiate Captain Wilder towards her eldest son through the architectural abilities of the younger.

“ Oh ! no ; pray don’t disturb him, papa ; he will be much more pleasantly employed elsewhere ; and we can get on very well without him,” observed Miss Wilder, who approached at the moment, adding immediately after.—“ I challenge you to a game at backgammon Mr. Robert Ashton ; you beat me shamefully when last we met, but I can play better now.”

Thus called on, Robert could do no less than bring the board ; but a strange smile was on his lips as he turned for that purpose.

“ How did you manage to remove those large

shrubs on your lawn Mrs. Praed; and how did the plan succeed?" asked Captain Wilder.

"The shrubs are flourishing; but as to how they were removed you must ask Frazer about that, for it was all his doing; I never interfere with him in farm or garden. Having been brought up to attend to both he must be much better qualified for the task than I can be;" replied Mrs. Praed with a more lofty air than usual, not being as it seemed in very high good humour.

"This may do very well for Mrs. Praed; but I am of a more active turn, and must always be employed," remarked Captain Wilder in a low voice to Mesdames Ashton and Leir, shrugging his shoulders.

"You are a sailor, and cannot bear to be idle. I never knew a naval man who did not like change and bustle," observed Mrs. Leir.

Captain Wilder smiled; and Mrs. Ashton fidgeted round to make up a whist table, which was at last accomplished; Mr. Ashton, who

left all the arrangements to his wife, taking Mrs. Praed for his partner against Captain Wilder and Mrs. Leir.

Seeing that Robert and Miss Wilder were at backgammon, which they made far more noisy than it need have been, Edward proposed chess to Miss Knight, who readily assented ; but Mrs. Wilder, who looked over them for some time, pronounced them the most careless players she had ever seen, and walked away to converse with Emma.

Mr. Fleetwood remained a fixture by Cecil : whilst Mrs. Ashton roamed from one to the other of her guests, interrupting all and pleasing none.

“ Two games and a gammon, without your winning a single hit, I believe, Miss Wilder,” exclaimed Robert Ashton a short time before the breaking up of the whist party.

“ Yes ; and I do not know which is the most intolerable, your luck or your ungenerous triumph,” replied that young lady, approach-

ing the card players to look over her father's hand.

“Then you allow nothing to my skill though you boasted of being such a superior player,” remarked Robert with a look, that looked very much like malicious mischief. “For my part, I think I never saw you play so ill; such a wild reckless game;—just the play of a despairing gambler.”

“I am always for a bold open game; no covert schemes for me,” replied Helen with a heightened colour, keeping her eyes fixed on her father's hand.

“Ay, you are a forward player, Miss Wilder.”

“Pray do not accuse my daughter of forwardness,” exclaimed Captain Wilder laughing, and without looking up to see how his daughter bore it.

“Miss Wilder understands what I mean,” replied Robert carelessly, sauntering towards Cecil and her attendant beau.

“ Well, Fleetwood ; now that you really are come back, I hope you intend to remain, and enact the good old English gentleman. The French can invent new modes and barricade old streets without your assistance ; and your tory principles will prevent your joining the Carbonari, or figuring as a member of the young Germany. Neither the uncle Heine’s lottery, nor the nephew Heine’s constitutions, find favor in your sight. You intend to be a thorough John Bull of course ; eating roast beef, instead of frogs—drinking Port, instead of Champagne and Hochheimer.”

“ Not quite such a thorough John Bull as you imagine. The monkey who has seen the world must naturally have acquired some few monkey tricks,” replied Mr. Fleetwood gaily.

“ Which you intend to exhibit for the benefit and amusement of all home staying lads and lasses. It would be a dangerous experiment for any one else in this good tory county, where all changes are so especially

eschewed as dangerous innovations ; but, being the best match within its bounds, young, handsome, rich, and accomplished, you will have all who desire to get themselves or their daughters well married in your favor ; and that forming a tolerably large share of our population, if any one may venture on such a perilous course it is you. But you ought in prudence to have tried the experiment sooner, before there was a young viscount to divide and share your popularity. By the bye, I believe you know Lord Fitz Elwyn—do you not?”

“ Very slightly.”

“ What sort of a creature is he ?”

“ A very proper youth for the army ; looks well in regimentals, prates of the deeds of ancient heros, flirts a fan, and waltzes to perfection.”

“ I understand ;—a person to look at, but not to talk to ;—to dance with, but not to live with : I suspected as much. A pity that he is such a near neighbour ; I hate idle common-

place young men lounging in at all hours to *ennuyer* you because they are *ennuyé* themselves."

"Perhaps you may make something of him ; I judge more from hearsay than personal knowledge. We only met once ; and then we did not get on very well together. Our politics differ you know ; he is a whig, and bored me about Greece and Italy being restored to their former splendour, when they were the first in arts and arms. Those Greeks and Romans were very fine fellows I dare say in their time ; but I prefer being an Englishman in the present day ; and as for their descendants the Italians and Philhellenes—they must be kept under with a strong hand till better fitted to be free."

"Certainly ; and the keeping them slaves in mind and body will enable them to appreciate and prove themselves worthy of the rights and privileges of freemen—when they get them. Pellico, Maroncelli, Gonfalonieri ; and the

other felons at Spielberg have doubtless come out far better prepared for freedom than before their incarceration," replied Robert with mock gravity.

"No, no : I am not quite such a despot as that," said Mr. Fleetwood half vexed, and half amused at the covert satire, which had won an approving smile from Cecil. "I dare say if the poor fellows had applied to me, that I should have helped them out of prison, though, as you say, I am no favorer of the carbonari ; but you never can resist a cut even at your best friends."

"I always admired moderation in religion, politics, and love," answered Robert with pretended indifference, glancing at Cecil, who was bending over a purse on which she had been employed throughout the evening. "Is it true that this delightful viscount is going to marry Lady Barbara Hetherton? If so, you need not fear him as a rival, despite waltzing, flirting, and regimentals."

“ Perfectly true ; I understand the Barringhams speak openly on the subject. It will be a very proper match ; she is rich and handsome, and will not overpower him with her superior mind.”

“ That is as it should be. People of rank and fashion have no need of sense ; they should leave that to their inferiors to maintain the balance of fortune. This wedding being a fact, you may give yourself as many airs as you please, Fleetwood ; and I would advise you not to be humble, for humility is always put upon, as I find to my cost.”

“ Thank you for the advice, and warning example,” replied Mr. Fleetwood, with a smile at Robert’s oddity, which he had encountered often enough to understand.

A loud laugh from Captain Wilder, echoed by one less loud from Mrs. Leir, drew the two young men to the whist table in time to hear Mrs. Praed say to her partner :—

“ How could you possibly revoke, Mr. Ash-

ton? Trumping with a heart when you had two clubs in your hand! But for that, we must have had the game."

"I suppose I did not see the clubs at the moment," replied Mr. Ashton, as placidly as if he had played the very best play in the world; and was not receiving a third scolding from Mrs. Praed.

"People should have their eyes and their wits about them when they play whist; it is a fine old English game, and not to be rattled over like *écarté* or *vingt-un*. I believe this is what I owe you, Captain Wilder," observed Mrs. Praed rising with a lofty air, and joining her niece.

If Mr. Fleetwood had intended, as Robert believed, to resume his seat by Cecil, he was thwarted; for she had slipped quietly out of the room during the bustle occasioned by the revoke; and the guests soon after took their departure, Miss Wilder and Miss Knight being

escorted to their respective carriages, by their respective beaux.

“Miss Wilder is really a clever, spirited girl,” observed Robert to his brother, as they were crossing the hall to return to the drawing room.

“Is she?” was Edward’s brief reply.

Robert laughed a mischievous laugh; but said no more.

“Mr. Ashton should not pretend to play whist, for he knows nothing of the game; and never understands when he has been in the wrong. He made no apology for revoking, which any other gentleman would have done; but then he might almost as well be dumb, for he never speaks more than ten words throughout an evening; and his fussy wife lets one have no peace. She is the most unquiet person I know; cannot be still—meddles and makes about every thing and every body. A field of wheat cannot be sown but she must be

consulted. I wonder how they ever keep a bailiff—always for trying some new plan. And yet what can she know about farming? I leave all those things to Frazer. It was a most intolerably stupid party,” observed Mrs. Praed as the carriage drove off, “I am tired to death.”

“So am I,” joined in her yawning niece.

“I am glad that it is all over. I do not know when I have spent such a tiresome evening. It was so stupid in Edward sitting all the evening by Miss Knight, who requires her bigoted aunt’s fortune to make her bearable. She has no character; and I am sorry Edward should so throw himself away. I wanted to ask him several questions about my plans; but he never came near me. It was very dull. Mrs. Ashton talks more than she thinks; and with all her wish for improving has not the sense to accomplish it; and yet she was giving me advice about my bridge, and retailing all the ill-natured sayings about its destruction. You and Robert seemed the only persons who

enjoyed yourselves," exclaimed Captain Wilder, addressing his daughter during their drive home.

"Robert does very well to talk nonsense with ; any thing to get away from his mother," replied the young lady smothering a yawn.

"People may say what they will of the trouble of giving dinners, and entertaining their guests, I find no trouble in either ; yet my parties always go off uncommonly well ; and my guests are all pleased," observed Mrs. Ashton with considerable self complacency, as she busied herself in replacing some of the chairs, prints, and books after the departure of her company.

Poor woman ! How great would have been her discomfiture could she have overheard the remarks already related. Of all her guests there was not one who praised her party or her powers of entertaining. Yes, we are wrong ; Mr. Fleetwood's soliloquy as he rode home was decidedly laudatory. "Very friendly of Mrs

Ashton to ask me to dine there without ceremony; and how very kind she is to Miss Clare, who is far more interesting now than in the blaze of her beauty and prosperity. She was handsomer then; her form more rounded, her complexion more brilliant:—then she dazzled with her loveliness—now her look of suffering—her downcast eyes, and fragile figure ask and command your pity and protection:—before, she received homage as her due, or as if unconscious of its worth—now she is grateful for attention, yet as far from seeking it as ever, and would not unsought be won. They are kind and worthy people those Ashtons; the father regards her with quite a parental air—the mother is occupied with plans for restoring her to health—the pretty Emma looks prettier still when praising her friend—Edward is always ready to place her a chair, or a footstool; and Robert,—by the way, I wonder how he could have spent all the winter in her society and not have become attached to her; yet he

introduced me immediately—promoted our being together, and has invited me to ride over to-morrow to see his hunter. He is a good fellow, though sometimes wilful. And all this kindness to a penniless girl. But then such a girl! I admired her at Liverpool—I love:—no, not love her on a first introduction, that is far too romantic and foolish—I pity her;—and no one has a right to control my actions.”

So ended Mr. Fleetwood’s soliloquy. People talk nonsense to themselves sometimes as well as to others. Let who will call them to account for the same.

“What was that about Mr. Fleetwood’s riding over to-morrow?” asked Mrs. Ashton of her eldest son, as they were ascending the stairs to their rooms.

“He is to come over and see my hunter.”

“Does he know that Cecil goes early?”

“I did not ask him. Good night,” replied Robert turning into his own apartment. “I am sure he does not from the sparkling of his

eye when I gave the invitation," said this same Robert to himself, as he placed his candle on the dressing table, and stood opposite the glass but without remarking one single trait of the face so strongly reflected in it. "Now would I consent to be talked to by my mother a whole month without cessation, if I could by such a penance learn what were Cecil's feelings throughout this evening. I could not have been mistaken in her start and blush when Fleetwood was announced; and yet she received him when introduced with the most perfect composure. Skinner declares that Fleetwood never spoke to her at Liverpool—that they did not even stand in the same quadrille; and that nothing passed between them, but her declining an introduction; and yet she always looks embarrassed when he is named. Is it only that she feels so keenly the difference of her present position in society, and stands rebuked for her pride? Why did she leave the

room this evening so abruptly? And why was her face bent so lowly above her work? Was she only tired, as she whispered to Emma? I guess a mystery, which I will read let it bring weal or woe. She has an intensity of feeling rarely surpassed; and an almost equal power of controlling its display; but I am not to be baffled. They call her sweet and gentle;—and so she is in the every day affairs of life; but there is a strength and force in her character which my gossiping mother and loving sister have not discovered; she is grateful and affectionate to both, but she keeps her most precious thoughts to herself. They may be contented to praise her smile—I will read her heart. And what for?—I am a fool!” he exclaimed the following instant, catching the expression of his own features in the glass before which he had unconsciously continued standing,

Well might he be startled at that reflection;

a physiognomist might have read his heart in the wild and troubled expression of those moveable features, as clearly as he sought to read the heart of Cecil. And what a heart! so full of strange and contradictory emotions. Of love and hate—of jealousy and trust—of high and generous impulses—of mean ungenerous plans. No wonder that his manner was so fitful and unaccountable! He was the slave of the moment's fancy; with mental powers that made him restless in his idleness; and yet without the resolution to tax those powers for the good of others or himself.

“Yes, I certainly am a fool!” he repeated
“and a flirt too, the world asserts. Query is there any difference between them; and if so in what does it consist? Let me see;—a fool need not be a flirt; but a flirt must be a fool. Is that it? I am not quite sure but am too sleepy to discuss the question philosophi-

cally; so good night, Mr. Fool; and I wish you pleasant dreams."

And we echo his wish, holding a pleasant dream one of the most delightful things in this troublous life.

CHAPTER VI.

"REMEMBER, my dear Cecil, that if you should not find yourself comfortable at the Fords, or the sea air should not agree with you, we shall be delighted to see you back at Ashton Grove. This is your home, mind," said Mrs. Ashton as she folded a shawl round her departing guest.

"Yes, my child; you will always find a welcome here," repeated Mr. Ashton.

"Do come back soon; for I do not know

what we shall do without you. I could almost wish that the Fords should prove very disagreeable," exclaimed the affectionate Emma, throwing her arms round her neck. "I have learnt to love you so very much."

"You are all kind—too kind," replied poor Cecil, returning Emma's embrace, and vainly endeavouring to speak her thanks.

"I should like to know how Cecil is ever to get well if you upset her with your nonsense, Emma," said Mrs. Ashton, drawing her daughter away. "One would think she was going for years, instead of only a month or six weeks at the most; we cannot part with her longer."

"Good bye, Cecil; I have put you up a choice collection of books; and shall long for your return that we may talk them over; but then you must return quite strong and well," said Edward, taking a brotherly leave of her.

The whispered reply of the invalid made him step back with a blush. Edward generally called her Cecil—Robert rarely, if ever.

“Good bye, Miss; and I hope you will come back as red as a poppy,” said honest Flinter, who had always taken a great interest in Cecil from her first arrival, either from her own winning kindness, or the regard shown for her by his master.

“Thank you, Flinter; and I hope there will be no poppies in your fields to compare with my cheeks,” replied Cecil kindly.

“Oh! I don’t mind a few poppies, Miss; they looks pretty among the corn; and there is an old saying—no weeds, no grain.”

“Good bye,” said Robert; my best wishes attend you. A parting like an amnesty buries all faults in oblivion—does it not?”

“Certainly: in absence we think only of the good qualities of those whom we have left,” replied Cecil warmly, touched by the earnestness of his appeal.

“If I should never return to Ashton Grove—if I should see none of you again, to thank you for all this kindness, remember that my last

earthly thoughts, and prayers will be for you and yours dear Emma," whispered Cecil, bending from the carriage to take a last farewell of her affectionate friend, after Mrs. Leir and all her packages were finally arranged, then throwing herself back she motioned the servant to close the door.

The door was closed, and the carriage drove off amid the reiterated injunctions of Mrs. Ashton to be careful of herself and not catch cold, &c. &c.; whilst Cecil once more leaning forward waved a last adieu to those who had so anxiously sought to restore her health, and promote her happiness.

"What makes you so pale, Emma? What did Cecil say?" asked Mrs. Ashton of her daughter, who, shocked at her friend's parting whisper, continued staring after the fast receding carriage.

Roused by the question she repeated Cecil's words.

"Bless me! is she really so ill? We must

have better advice—we must take her up to town directly,” exclaimed the warm hearted Mrs. Ashton, glancing at her husband, then running forward some steps as if to stop the travellers, who were already nearly out of sight. “There can be no real cause for alarm,” she added after the pause of a few moments: “Cecil is very delicate, but in no danger; it is only a sick girl’s fancy—fresh air and new scenes and faces will soon set her up again; she has moped herself too much throughout the winter—that is all.”

“You do not know Cecil Clare,” observed Robert in a tone that surprised his hearers.

“And what more do you know of her?” asked his mother rather sharply.

“Nothing,” replied Robert walking away to avoid further queries.

Mrs. Leir if not a talented was a kind hearted woman; and took good care of her charge;—not travelling too far in the day—wrapping her up warm—and amusing her by

pointing out every object worthy notice as Mrs. Ashton had advised, so that Cecil, when she arrived at Muddiford, where she found the Ford's carriage ready to take her on to Milford, was certainly looking considerably better than on her departure from Ashton Grove.

Bidding Mrs. Leir farewell with many thanks for her care, Cecil entered her cousin's Britzcha, and it being that dusky, dreamy light which woos to thought—the very atmosphere of memory—the traveller was driven to look into her own mind, instead of out on the objects, which she passed on her route.

She had been very anxious to leave Ashton Grove, notwithstanding the affection of all its inmates; with the restlessness generally attendant on suffering, she longed for change; but now that change was come, she half regretted her departure, and sighed as she thought of the friendly group that had bade her farewell a few mornings since, each intimating a wish for her speedy return. Her anxiety to leave them

seemed something like ingratitude;—but she was not ungrateful;—oh, no! It was better that she should not remain at Ashton Grove—much better; and she meant to return, if she ever returned, with the poppies on her cheek of which Flinter had spoken; and a cheerfulness that would cast no gloom over their fire side.

Return!—should she ever return? The solution of the question rested with the future; and she resolutely turned her thoughts to other subjects.

Cecil's mind was stronger than the frame in which it dwelt; and yet it preyed upon that frame rendering it weaker and weaker; but this was not to be permitted unrebuked. Her severe and sudden losses—her delicate health, and the months spent in retirement had strongly impressed on her mind the instability of human life, and human happiness; suffering had been a bitter but a useful medicine, bringing to the mind a more healthful tone, though it left a paleness on her cheek. In her pros-

perity young, rich, and beautiful; courted, followed, flattered;—in the full flow of youthful spirits, she had never dreamt of suffering, but thought to pass through life sportive and happy—a flower flung upon the stream of fortune, borne by the current between lovely banks into a peaceful haven, without an effort of her own; and though naturally endowed with strong and generous affections, with gentle pity, and with noble sympathies; yet still, unknown to herself (for she knew little then of the heart's deceitfulness) pride and presumption had mingled with her higher qualities, marring the beauty of her character. In her poverty she had better learnt to know herself, her duties and her faults. She no longer considered happiness as hers of right; and if she still wept when sorrow came, it was in sadness and submission, not in rebellious passion. She had looked more narrowly into the situation of those around her; no longer a spoilt child and flattered heiress, she now saw herself but a unit in one mighty total;

and instead of expecting that all should run according to her pleasure (she standing above grief the while, untouched by suffering) she admitted that her fate must be twined in with that of others;—millions of atoms blending in one gigantic whole—none holding on its course alone; but each and all tending to one end;—on earth the grave—beyond an immortality of bliss or woe. She was no longer an object of envy, above the pity of those around her; she had suffered—had needed that pity; and had found it. The lot of man was suffering; and as she had met with pity; so must she pity others. She had no right to withdraw from the active duties of life and pine away in lonely misery, because the golden visions of her youth had all departed. She had no right to yield to grief unchecked; she felt with the noble Elliot “that sorrow was selfish,” if it rendered her less willing, or less able to succour others; selfish to man, ungrateful to her maker. She was not placed on earth only to eat, and drink, and

sleep, and sport away a life, as insects sport away a sunny hour ; she had higher powers—was called to higher duties ;—she had comparatively little left—but that little must not be wasted in impotent repining.

Such were the lessons taught to Cecil by her losses ; but as yet she had not learnt them fully ; she felt their wisdom, but they were not always the rule of her actions, and at times she would long with a wild and passionate longing to be with those who had gone before—to rest in the silent grave where sorrow was not known ; and then she would bow her head in shame at this impatience at her lot, a lot still so full of blessings. She had friends—kind, constant friends ;—she had youth and talents ; and health might be restored :—she was not pinched with hunger—she was not starved with cold ;—she thought of the shivering wretches whom she had seen homeless, friendless ; wanderers on the earth, with none to smile upon them—none to cheer ; and tears,

large tears of penitence rolled down her cheeks, at the remembrance of her own sinful discontent; and yet—and yet—such is the weakness of our human nature, the next half hour her blessings were well nigh forgotten—her woes alone remembered. Her heart was not yet strictly disciplined; it had much yet to learn and bear, ere it could say in full sincerity—
“Thy will be done.”

Mrs. Ford was a second cousin of the late Mr. Clare, (a relationship of which she had boasted in his prosperity) but Cecil had never seen her since she was nine years old, when Mrs. Ford had spent a week at her father's splendid mansion in the environs of Liverpool. At that age she could not be expected to form a very accurate judgment of character; but all she remembered of the lady and her two daughters, who were a little older than herself, was highly pleasing. Mrs. Ford had brought her toys and *bon bons*—Mrs. Ford had praised her more extravagantly than she was in the

habit of hearing herself praised by other ladies, to the regret of poor Mrs. Clare, who did her best to save her child from the intoxicating tones of flattery;—Mrs. Ford had made her own children give up to her in every thing; and finally, Mrs. Ford had insisted that she should hereafter marry her eldest son, who, she declared had, at the age of eleven, conceived an unchangeable affection for his cousin of nine. This last did not speak very highly in favor of Mrs. Ford's sense; and the same might be said of the other particulars, which recurred to Cecil's memory; but her invitation had been kindly worded, and was the only notice she had received from former friends or relatives; no wonder therefore that the invalid, who had sighed for change of air and scene, was under such circumstances inclined to judge gratefully instead of critically.

The Fords had only returned, a few months before, from a long residence in Newfoundland, where Mr. Ford had held an appointment

under government ; which accounted for Cecil's not having seen them since her childhood ; but she knew that they had corresponded with her father, though his dislike to writing, except on business, had made his answers brief and rare. The two eldest daughters Ann and Susan, as well as the precocious lover, Beckington Ford, had been left in England with their grandmother for education, whilst the two younger girls had accompanied their parents.

Cecil only remembered Mr. Ford as a heavy, but then rather good looking man, who agreed to all her father's propositions, and praised all in and about the house, particularly the wines and viands, of which he partook in considerable quantities, of course to qualify himself the better to give judgment thereon. She did not expect to find a superlative degree of talent in any of the family—she only desired kindness ; and that she could not fail of meeting, else why had she been invited, and

invited so warmly, when nothing could be obtained from her in return ?

It may be as well to inform our readers, lest any one should be ignorant of the fact, that the pretty village of Milford is situated on the Hampshire coast about four miles from Lymington ; and nearly opposite the Needles, which, with the open sea to the right, and the lofty cliffs of Alum Bay on the left, form a striking view as seen from the beach, or the high land above. The sands are narrow, but firm ; bounded and edged by earthy cliffs and abounding in geological specimens of an antediluvian world. At low water, you may ride along the beach to the west till you reach the more fashionable bathing village of Mud-diford, about two miles from Christchurch ; whilst, towards the east, runs a high shingly bank, at the point of which stands Hurst Castle, a low, fortified building, where the unhappy Charles was confined for a short time, after quitting Carisbrook ; and in which his

chamber is still shown. Stretching back from this point towards the land, extends a considerable area of mud and sea, denominated the back water, terminating in a landing place at Key Haven ; where the pleasure seekers of Milford generally embark on their water excursions, as the sea usually rolls in on the open beach with a considerable surf, which, though not dangerous, renders an embarkation thence unpleasant and difficult for ladies. Round the castle stand some detached buildings principally destined to the use of the men stationed there on the preventive service ; with a lighthouse, a tall breakwater ; and a square enclosure for a garden, fenced with a low stone wall, from which waves the graceful tamarisk, bowing to the breeze as it sweeps over the neck of land, then rising again, its flexile branches all uninjured by its lowly bending. Oakfield Villa where Mrs. Ford resided was a new erection on the high ground between Milford and the little church at Hordle, lying further

to the west; and though its garden and shrubbery were still in their infancy, they were prettily laid out, and on a bright May day gave a fair promise of future beauty; but it was too dark when Cecil arrived for her to see any of the perfections of Oakfield Villa;—its well laid out grounds, or the fine sea view commanded by its windows.

Mrs. Ford came forward to receive her young cousin with friendly warmth—Mr. Ford laid down his magazine (the deepest study he ever engaged in) to say that he was glad to see her, and hoped she was well; and the two eldest daughters, who were out, stopped practising some Italian music, to make what they considered graceful courtesies; whilst the two young ladies, who were not out, a tall gawky girl of fifteen, and a short awkward rolly polly one of eleven, after looking first at their visitor, and then at each other, burst into a giggle, unnoticed, or at least unrebuked by their parents.

“ You are tired, my dear ; a little tea will refresh you : we only waited till you came. Lotty, my love, ring the bell,” said Mrs. Ford ; and the rolly polly obeyed, tittering all the way she went.

Tea was soon over, though it had seemed long to poor Cecil, and very different from the gay, social meal at Ashton Grove ; and Mrs. Ford having exhausted all the questions she could think of to put to her visitor, finding the task of entertaining heavy, as no one aided her, proposed her guest’s retiring, in the supposition that she must be fatigued after her journey ; and Cecil, wishing to be alone, gladly caught at the idea.

“ Your room is rather high up, my dear ; but I thought you would like a view of the sea, and the other apartments will all be occupied next week, for I am expecting the Hattons : and being a first visit we must pay them more than common civility ; particularly as Beckington is shortly to be united to the eldest

daughter," said Mrs. Ford, as she marshalled Cecil to her chamber, which was neither more nor less than a garret.

"Here go my consequence and destined husband at once! So much for the unchangeable love of eleven, evidenced by a locket, containing his hair, which I was compelled to promise never to part with," thought Cecil with a smile, and without a pang too. She did not fancy Mr. Beckington Ford for a husband! and had no desire to be made of consequence, that is made a fuss with, as in former days; and she really did wish a view of the sea, which last she asserted with ready politeness to prevent further apologies; had she known how few apologies were intended she might not have been so scrupulously civil.

Mrs. Ford hurried over the usual enquiries as to whether she needed this, that, or the other; ascertained that her trunks had been brought up; and then wishing her good night, and a refreshing sleep hastened away, glad to

escape from the little garret, which felt cold and cheerless, notwithstanding the fire which Cecil, by Mrs. Ashton's directions, had requested, or rather the embers of a fire, for there was nothing more.

The weather was cold for the season; and Cecil rang the bell for some more coals; but the bell remained unanswered though she rang a second time; so trusting to have every discomfort remedied on the morrow, she betook herself to bed; and soothed by the murmur of the tide which reached her through the stilly night sank into a tranquil slumber.

The sun was shining in at her window, and thousands of motes were playing in its rays, when she awoke on the following morning. For awhile she stood admiring the blue expanse before her, its waves, crested with foam, riding in towards the land from the south; and bounded on the east by the rocks called the Needles, standing boldly out against the clear grey sky behind; and flanked by the precipi-

tous cliffs of Alum Bay of snowy whiteness, that glittered in the summer sun. But bright as was the sun it did not warm her little room ; and when Cecil looked round on its mean and scanty furniture, a doubt of her cousin's kind intentions flashed across her ; but she dismissed it on the instant:—there was presumptive proof of that kindness. What could have induced her pressing invitation but friendly motives?—She was too critical—she had been petted by her parents—and petted by the Ashtons, who had been so anxious to prevent her feeling the loss of wealth and relatives—she had been spoilt ; and must bear the penalty : she must no longer expect to be petted, but learn to bear the rubs of every day life, not pining for delicate sympathy, but grateful for commonplace kindness. She was too sensitive ; and must control her imagination, and check its idle whims and fancies.

Her room was very small, with a very low ceiling, though in a very high situation ; the

dingy coloured walls looked suspicious of damp;—the bed was not very luxurious—the chairs and table of a very country make; and the window so badly constructed as to admit the wind all round, if not all through; and the whole aspect of the apartment, save just when the sun was shining in, was chill and desolate; yet still Mrs. Ford could mean her nothing but kindness; and a word of her delicate health, and chilly nature would suffice to remedy every discomfort; and the view might reconcile her to mounting three pair of stairs, and some other minor disagreeables. She looked out once more on;—

“The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The ever fresh—the ever free.”

and again the murmur of the incoming tide came on her ear with the lulling power of peace and hope; and this hopeful spirit did not desert her, though it required a third ringing of her bell to procure the attendance of the maid, who looked sulky at the sum-

mons ; and half impertinent at the request to keep a better fire, as not being accustomed to the sea breezes, Cecil found it cold and damp.

“ Good morning, you are an early riser, I see,” said Mrs. Ford on entering the room where her young cousin had been sitting alone for more than an hour, waiting the assembling of the family, for their morning’s meal.

“ Not very early to-day ; for it was half past nine when I came down,” replied the half famished Cecil, glancing at a time piece which stood at half past ten.

“ It is a very good habit to rise early ; and another morning you shall not have to wait so long for your breakfast, but take that meal with Jemima and Lotty ; both myself and the dear girls are delicate, which compels us to a little self-indulgence in this matter.”

“ I am sorry to hear that you and my cousins are invalids ; I had no idea of such being the case,” remarked Cecil with a properly sympathetic tone as she believed, though

conscious of a feeling of surprise at the information ; for the whole family looked full of health and vigour.

“ You judge from appearances, which are often deceitful,” observed Mrs. Ford with a little acidity.

“ I am afraid they are indeed,” thought her cousin ; but as she made no reply, Mrs. Ford continued.

“ I hope you slept well ; though I need hardly ask, for you look quite a different creature this morning ; restored to perfect health only by one night of our sea air.”

“ You forget that appearances are so often deceitful ; and most assuredly so in this instance ; for the fresh sea air so invigorating to those in health is too keen for my weakened frame ; and I have been petted and kept so warm that my room felt cold. I have requested the servant to give me a little more fire to night ; and I fear I must take a lesson in ringing your bells ; for I can make no one

hear me," said Cecil, stating all her discomforts in a playful tone not to offend her hostess ; but her hostess did not understand playfulness ; and looked both surprised and annoyed at the remark about appearances being deceitful ; and still blacker at the complaint of the mean fire, to hide which annoyance and prevent further complaints she assumed a lofty and advising air, intended to put down her cousin, and awe her into silence for the future.

" You must learn to innure yourself to cold, my dear ; I see plainly that you require bracing, and a fire in your bed-room, particularly at this season of the year, is one of the most relaxing things I know ;—my girls have no fire. As for the bells, they are particularly well hung ; but the servants are much engaged in the morning ; for I cannot afford with my family to keep idle domestics. The lady's maid is of course occupied with me, and my daughters ; but I will tell the under housemaid to attend to your bell. I thought you had learnt to dress

yourself; or would have given orders last night."

"I desire nothing but to have my gown fastened," answered Cecil hurt at these remarks.

"I am glad you can do something for yourself; young people should always be brought up independent of servants, particularly daughters of bankers and merchants; for there is no knowing what they may come to. I am sure I never guessed that all your father's splendour was only empty show."

"My father, madam, suffered from false friends, and dishonest agents."

"Very right for you to say so, my dear; but you know nothing of business," observed Mrs. Ford interrupting her guest. "Will you have bread or toast?" she asked handing her at the same time a cup of tea, too weak to injure her nerves.

"Thank you; dry toast, and a cup of chocolate," replied Cecil, putting back the tea.

"I do not think chocolate a proper thing for you; but as you may be fatigued after your journey. I shall not forbid it this morning," said Mrs. Ford evidently displeased at her cousin's presuming to have a choice.

"I was ordered chocolate by my medical attendant, and promised Mrs. Ashton to continue using it," observed Cecil firmly, beginning to see the necessity of insisting on those luxuries, which her late illness had rendered needful.

"Mrs. Ashton is considered a fidget and a coddle; I must take you in hand I see; and try a totally different plan."

"Mrs. Ashton is a most estimable woman! —a warm friend and attentive nurse," replied Cecil with a spirit which checked any further comment from Mrs. Ford.

The young ladies soon after made their appearance, and in due, or undue time, Mr. Ford himself, unshod, uncravated, in dressing gown and slippers. There was little talking at break-

fast—no conversation; but Cecil's decision though quick was correct, when she set down Mr. Ford as a selfish, sycophantic gourmand; and his daughters as silly, missy girls with some accomplishments, but little real knowledge, and whose sole ambition was to be married—well, if their parents could manage it;—but at any rate to be married.

“I must pay some visits this morning; and it is already late I see. Will you come into the school-room my dear; and help me hear Jemima and Lotty their lessons?” said Mrs. Ford to her cousin on the conclusion of breakfast.

“With great pleasure:” replied Cecil good naturedly.

The school-room was a dull apartment at the back of the house, with a scanty supply of tables and chairs; an old piano, on which Jemima was strumming, an hour glass on the mantel-piece; and three half-filled book shelves on the opposite wall.

“Now, Lotty my dear, your cousin will be kind enough to hear your French lesson; and you must do your best to bring no discredit on my teaching. I have been their sole instructress, Cecil, so you must make allowances.”

“You forget Miss Jaffer, mamma,” said Jemima.

“Oh! poor thing; a daily governess that we took out of charity at Newfoundland,” replied Mrs. Ford.

Lotty looked half inclined to refuse saying her lesson to her new cousin; but Cecil's encouraging manner overcame her awkward shyness; and the task was repeated, though very incorrectly, and evidently without being understood by the repeater. To this succeeded history, geography, and a music lesson to Jemima; Mrs. Ford, who fidgeted in and out of the room to give orders, and dress for her visits, taking no further part in the morning's instructions than keeping Cecil fully employed till the children's dinner was placed on the table.

The girls get on uncommonly well with you," remarked Mrs. Ford, though Jemima had been exceedingly troublesome, and provoking; and as a reward for their attention shall have the pleasure of accompanying you to the sands, and picking up sea weed; a few walks on the beach will restore you to perfect health. I have arranged for your dining with the girls, an early dinner being so essential for an invalid; and you will thus avoid encountering strangers, which, under present circumstances, you would find unpleasant."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ford; but I cannot think of this. I have not been in the habit of dining early; and have promised Mrs. Ashton not to shun society."

Mrs. Ashton may arrange matters as she chooses in her own house my dear; but I rule here. If hungry, you can have a little pudding, or a sandwich when we dine; but you must make your real dinner now; early hours are conducive to health; and I have set my heart

on seeing you with a milkmaid's colour, I only wish the customs of fashionable society would allow me to dine at the same time. Mr. Ford and myself never decide on anything without due consideration ; but once decided, nothing can turn us. Our will is law in this house :— is not it Jemima ?”

“ Not when I can help it,” replied Jemima pertly ; and her mother laughing at her impertinence left the room as if determined to listen to no remonstrances from Cecil ; nor did she again return, only sending a request by her eldest daughter that her cousin would give Lotty a music lesson after their walk.

What could all this mean ? Did Mrs. Ford intend her to play governess to her ignorant, tiresome, younger daughters, believing that she had no friends to interfere in her behalf, and hoping to obtain her services at a cheap rate ?

If such was her suspicion on the first day of her arrival, it was converted into a certainty ere the close of the week, when she overheard

Jemima reply to some question put to her by a gentleman whom they encountered on the sands—‘ Oh don’t you know? That is our new governess—mamma’s poor cousin, whom she takes out of pity.’

From the moment of her entrance into the family the conduct pursued towards her had been perfectly consistent, supposing such to be their intentions; no other views could satisfactorily account for their behaviour. The word governess had never been named, but the whole of its duties had been skilfully laid upon her; accidentally as it were—purely as an appeal to her good nature; whilst from a real or pretended care for her health she was deprived of most of her accustomed comforts, and banished from the drawing room, except for an hour or two in the evening when the Fords were alone; or when her assistance was required by the elder girls in their music or singing, Cecil being far their superior in both.

Where were the hopeful visions that had

cheered her on that bright May morning? Gone!—"Nor left e'en the wreck of a name." The truth could be no longer concealed. Mrs. Ford was not kind; and Cecil Clare was *de facto*, if not *de jure*, a governess; and that too without her consent—it might almost be said without her knowledge. Thus had her good-natured wish to oblige been turned to her own detriment. The indignant blood rushed up to her very brow, as she thought of the daily slights, not to say insults, to which she was subjected from the selfish, pompous Mr. Ford, the as cold and selfish Mrs. Ford, her missy, troublesome daughters; and the fine lady's maid, down to the very scullion, who grumbled at having an additional plate to wash—for where are the servants that do not take the tone of their masters and mistresses towards companions and governesses?

Had she encountered Mrs. Ford at the moment that lady might have been roused by her look alone out of her habitual chilling self-

possession ; but it was nearly an hour's walk to Oakfield Villa, and by the time she reached the gates her indignation had a little subsided ; and she determined to consider ere she acted. And as she lay on her little bed that night, with the pale moon streaming in upon her, she weighed the pros and cons with a fairness and judgment that would not have disgraced a philosopher.

A year back and she would have acted from the quick impulse of wounded pride and feeling, but suffering, as we have already said, had somewhat tamed the pride engendered by prosperity ; and she had better learned to take the evil with the good. Affection or even kindness from any of her elder cousins was no longer to be hoped for ; the good tempered Lotty alone appeared to feel the slightest interest in her comfort ; but still there were reasons that made her hesitate ere she decided on a strong remonstrance, and probable consequent departure.

She would have stated her difficulties to kind Mrs. Leir, who had invited her to spend some days with her at Muddiford, but that lady had just written to say that she was going into Devonshire to attend a wedding, so that her only alternatives were Oakfield Villa, or Ashton Grove. Jemima was idle, illtempered, ignorant and provoking:—Lotty, though more willing, was also more stupid:—the rest of the family any thing but what she liked—her situation awkward—her comforts few—her discomforts many; but to set against all this was the fact that, despite these disagreeables, her health had visibly improved, the air evidently agreeing with her; and however great her dislike to teaching wilful and stupid girls she had the judgment to see that this enforced occupation of the mind, if not pleasant, was wholesome. Her banishment from the drawing room under many a plausible pretext, though it deprived her of the pleasure which she might have derived from the pleasant society in the

neighbourhood, saved her from the penalty of the society within the house ; and reading was in her opinion a far more agreeable occupation than listening to the pompous declamations of Mr. Ford—the cold sarcasms of his lady, or the silly babbling of her daughters.

Cecil was not blind to the slights and vexations which she had already encountered, or would hereafter have to encounter ; she saw them all, and had resolution equal to her penetration ; but health was a great blessing—it was a long journey back to Ashton Grove :—and so—and so—she decided on remaining for a time at Oakfield Villa, giving moderate instructions to the hopeful Jemima and Lotty, and keeping herself to herself ; but assuming such an air, and acting so independently on all other points as to convince Mrs. Ford that she yielded for her own pleasure, not from being too timid to remonstrate ; and that she was not a person to be insulted with impunity. To avoid contention she submitted in silence

to many deprivations, and bore with admirable temper the provocations received from the selfish and penurious Mrs. Ford, and the irritating Jemima, who, longing for emancipation from the school room, purposely gave her instructress every possible annoyance.

Thus matters went on for three weeks ; the name of governess never uttered, and Cecil permitted to spend her time, when not teaching, just as she pleased, Mrs. Ford understanding from her manner that further demands, or more determined slights would deprive her children of an able instructress. In spite of the coldness of her temper, which was rarely hurried into an ebullition of passion, the lady of the mansion felt irritated at the bar placed on her employment of the whole of her poor cousin's time, but prudence required forbearance for a while : and her vexed selfishness yielded to present necessity :—hereafter she might make Cecil more of a drudge—and then she should feel her power ; and yet there were

moments when she doubted whether such a period would ever arrive.

And how had all the vexations of these three weeks been borne by Cecil? Admirably—most admirably! with the calm dignity of one resolved by constant vigilance to rule her heart to bear its lot, however hard that lot might be. And yet they had been wretched weeks, unsoothed by friendly sympathy. She had no earthly aid to support her in her trials; yet she yielded not, so the body gathered strength from the mind's vigour: and when at times the heart was well nigh sinking beneath its secret sorrow, she would think what others were enduring round her, and bending humbly before her maker would pray for strength to uphold her. Yet with all her resolutions to be not only contented but thankful, there were moments when she sighed to be back at Ashton Grove, among its kind and affectionate inmates—that very Ashton Grove which she had be-

fore so longed to leave. Such is the restlessness of suffering—such the inconsistency of human wishes. She had received three affectionate letters from Emma, each closed by a long postscript from Mrs. Ashton, containing wishes for her return, with sundry directions as to wraps, diet, &c. &c. (none of which Cecil could follow) and terminating with some pet piece of news; and as the arrival of the family at Lindmoor had been her greatest anxiety ever since the death of the late Earl she deplored in every postscript the non appearance of the Viscount, who was still however, according to report, expected every day; whilst fully as regular were her assurances that Mr. Fleetwood made many enquiries after her health.

In replying to these letters Cecil had declared herself to be getting stronger, and avoided every expression that could convey even a hint of the slights heaped upon her; but as she could not in her conscience praise her cousins, or speak

of their kindness, Emma and Robert guessed so near the truth, as to doubt her being particularly happy.

There were books at Oakfield Villa; but Mrs. Ford's books were drawing room books, not to be removed from their proper places on shelf or table; and above all things not to be profaned by a visit to the school room; but happily Edward's selection came to Cecil's help, affording her ample amusement and saving her from rebellion and open war, for a time at least:—how much longer she could submit must depend on circumstances.

The arrival of the Hattons caused little or no change in Cecil's course of life. The parents and youngest daughter were good natured people with scanty penetration, who considered Miss Clare's late misfortunes and delicate health as satisfactory reasons for her non appearance in her cousin's drawing room, except when required to play song or quadrille; whilst the eldest Miss Hatton who set up for a beauty,

and deserved to be set down for her impertinence, declared a school-room was the only fitting place for such persons as governesses ; and of course her *fiancé* Mr. Beckington Ford agreed with his lady fair ! His unchangeable love for his cousin at the precocious age of eleven had now given place to as unchangeable a love for Cecilia Hatton ; and a cold bow or indifferent good morning was all he vouchsafed to Miss Clare, whose greatest pleasure was wandering alone on the beach, listening to the murmurs of the crested waves.

“ Oh, cousin, such good news ! ” cried Lotty bursting into the school room one dusky evening, and flinging her arms round Cecil, who was sitting at the window watching the falling of the shadows with a painter’s eye—
“ You know to-morrow is my birth day. Well, I coaxed Mrs. Hatton, and she coaxed papa and mamma ; and we are to cross over to the Island and dine among the rocks—go through the Needles—climb up to the light-

house—and run about like mad. Won't it be fine fun ?”

“ I hope you will find it all as delightful as you anticipate, dear Lotty,” replied Cecil, kissing her round, red cheek, and sighing involuntarily, as she thought of her own blighted hopes.

“ Oh ! I shall be sure to find it delightful ; and so will you, Cecil, I am certain ; for you are to go too ; I should not care about it without you, for the others are all so cross in these parties.”

“ Thank you, dear child ; but my going is impossible ; your mamma would not like it ; and I should not find it pleasant.”

“ Oh ! but you must go, dear Cecil ! You said the other day you should like to go round the Needles and up to the light-house ; and so I told mamma that you must go too, or else I should certainly break my neck among the rocks, for no one helps me to clamber so well as you. You know how nicely we scramble

up Hordle Cliffs, looking for fossils. So when I persisted, and Mrs. Hatton said that it would be a nice change for you, poor thing, and do you good, mamma said—yes. And I am so delighted!—Are not you, Cecil?” cried the warm hearted Lotty, dancing about the room with nearly as much grace as a cow capering to a barrel organ. But her cousin saw nothing ludicrous in her movements—she only saw the affectionate heart that had thought of giving her pleasure.

“And you insisted because you thought it would please me, Lotty?” remarked Cecil in a tone which would have told one more versed in the depths of the human heart how deeply she felt the only kindness she had met with since her sojourn at Oakfield Villa.

“Are you crying about it, Cecil?” exclaimed Lotty, struck by her earnest tone and the tears in her eyes, ceasing her ridiculous caperings and running back to her cousin. “Are you vexed?”

“No, dear Lotty; only grateful. You may know what it is one of these days, though I pray you never may, to weep at kindness—even the kindness of a little girl.”

“I wish I could do more for you;—make you rich again,” cried the affectionate child, kissing away her tears, comprehending by the instinct of her own kind nature a something of her cousin’s feelings. “If I had my way you should not be kept moping here in this dull room. I can’t think why mamma does not like visitors to see you, unless it is because you are so much prettier than Ann or Susan, as Mr. Farnell said the other day, when he did not think I heard him. It does not matter about that now though dear Cecil, for you are to go to-morrow, so don’t cry any more; and when I am married you shall come and live with me—I promise you that. I know how to manage mamma by declaring that I should break my neck if you did not go.”

“I am much obliged to you, my dear Lotty,”

replied Cecil, returning her caresses; "but young as you are, even you must see the impropriety of my going on your mamma's enforced consent; and you must not speak of that mamma as you do; trying to win your way with threats."

"You may scold me as much as you please about what I say to, and of mamma; only don't tell me that you won't go;" cried the vexed child with a pouting lip. "But indeed and indeed you shall go!" she added again throwing her arms around her caressingly. "I would not give—thank you—to go unless you went too. No one else will help me to clamber about and pick sea weeds, and pieces of rock; and you are so good natured, and take such care of me, whilst Jemima is so very cross. You will go—won't you?"

"Indeed, Lotty, I cannot."

"What is all this hugging about?" enquired Mrs. Ford, who entered at the instant.

"I am only coaxing Cecil to go to-morrow,"

answered the half abashed Lotty, fearing to let her cousin speak, lest her words should be a flat denial.

“ You may spare yourself the pains, silly child ; for you are far too troublesome for me to undertake the charge of you ; and I came to tell Miss Clare that I intended her to join the party.”

Cecil's colour rose—her eyes flashed at Mrs. Ford's insulting tone ; and she would have instantly declined fulfilling her intentions, and asserted her independence, had not Lotty prest her little fat hand so firmly on her lips, as not only to prevent her from speaking, but almost from breathing, till Mrs. Ford had left the room.

“ This is too much !” cried Cecil starting up and flinging off the restraining hand.

“ Do go, dear cousin ? Don't be vexed ? Don't mind what mamma says ? Do go for my sake—only for my sake ? I love you so much—so very much !” cried poor Lotty clinging to her.

“ Love me, Lotty ? No, no :—it is a false word. One promised love and then—deceived me !” exclaimed Cecil Clare with such a startling vehemence of look and tone that the terrified child hid her face in her dress, whispering in a pleading voice :—

“ Oh ! Cecil, dear cousin Cecil ! don’t look so ?—you frighten me. I do love you very, very much indeed.”

These simple and affectionate words fell on Cecil’s heart with a soothing and controlling power : the vehemence of her indignation subsided, and sinking back in her chair she burst into a flood of tears, as she clasped the wondering Lotty in her arms.

“ Do not cry, dear Cecil ;” exclaimed Lotty crying too.

The burst of passionate feeling was over ; and Cecil was soon as calm to outward appearance as usual.

“ I am not strong in health, Lotty, or should not have been so overcome by the trials of the

present, and the thoughts of the past. You must think no more of this;—and you must name it to no one.”

“I will do any thing you wish, dear Cecil, since you go to-morrow for my sake,” cried the grateful girl. “But I do hope it will be fine; The sky looks much clearer than it did—does not it?”

CHAPTER VII.

Lotty had her wish, the day was fine ; and when she awoke in the morning Cecil was bending over her pillow, kissing her peaceful brow, and breathing prayers for her future happiness.

“Idle, Lotty ! to receive congratulations and presents on her birth-day in bed,” exclaimed her cousin, placing a book in her hands.

“Thank you ! Thank you !” cried the delighted girl, jumping up in bed, and hugging

her round the neck. "Six kisses—I will have six kisses on my birth-day; and you must say that you forgive me for all the trouble I have caused you; and I will try to be so good for the future! Will you forgive me, dear Cecil?"

"That will I, Lotty; and let the thought rest with you—it may bring comfort in your after life—that you have soothed the pangs of one who has more to bear than the world knows of. But you must up, Miss Sleeper! so good bye;" and again kissing the happy Lotty. Cecil left the room to hide her own emotion.

At half past ten the whole party embarked at Key Haven; a party of fifteen, besides two servants to prepare the dinner, Mr. Beckington Ford having invited three single gentlemen of the neighbourhood to join the expedition, and act as beaux to his sisters, and the youngest Miss Hatton.

Gaily sped the little boats up the winding passage between the mud banks; still more

gaily did they round the shingly point by Hurst Castle, skimming over the waves, rocked by the meeting tides. Then the sails were fairly set, and on they dashed towards the Needles, throwing the spray from off their prows, that fell in mimic showers over the light hearted voyagers, raising merry laughs among the younger ones of the party. The elders of the expedition maintained their sobriety, nay, even looked a little graver than usual from the consciousness of being on the treacherous sea, now curled by a freshening breeze; but the more youthful seemed too full of joy and sport to admit of gravity or fear; at least greater fear than the young ladies held to be becoming and interesting; pretty tremors and hinted terrors, that afforded the gentlemen an opportunity of proving the needlessness of these feminine alarms, or asserting in eloquent terms their determination to save their fair companions even at the risk of their own lives; whereupon the flattered damsels in return for such gallantry,

declared that with such heroic protectors they considered themselves as safe as on dry ground. Whether if either of the boats had been upset these eloquent heroes (neither of whom had ever swam more than twenty yards in his life) would have thought of the safety of the ladies instead of their own was not put to the proof;— (we should have been sorry to have held annuities depending on those ladies' lives under such circumstances) for the boats neared the Needles in safety; and turning abruptly round the outermost rock (the tide being too low to admit of passing within) dashed into the bay beyond.

Of all that merry, happy party Lotty proclaimed herself to be the merriest and the happiest, as she sat with one hand clasping the hand of her cousin, now watching the sea gulls in their wheeling flight, shouting to make them fly the faster; and now looking down into the clear waters, telling of the marvellous things that she saw in its depths (most marvellous

things indeed according to her account) or dipping her disengaged hand in the sea, letting the waves pass through her fingers, or slightly sprinkling her brother and sisters, then laughing with childish glee as they shrank from the sparkling shower. Her spirits were too high to be checked by Ann's rebukes or Jemima's cross replies; and Cecil alone succeeded in keeping her tolerably quiet; but as the boats dashed into the bay beyond the Needles her own admiration nearly equalled Lotty's; and an exclamation of delight involuntarily burst from her lips, which attracted the sneering wonder of Mr. Beckington Ford, and his elder sister, who held any thing approaching to enthusiasm to be the very antipodes of wisdom and fashion. Above was a bright blue sky, across which flitted a few light, snowy clouds—beneath the dancing sea, sparkling in the sun-beams:—before and to the right was no boundary to the expanse of water save the natural horizon; whilst on the other side perpendicular cliffs of

a fleecy whiteness rose to the height of five or six hundred feet from whence ran out a projecting point, and beyond this two isolated rocks, their heads once sharp, now gradually becoming more blunted from time and storm, from whence comes the name of the Needles, whilst overhead flew innumerable gulls, now hovering with a quivering motion, now wheeling in a circling flight, their white wings tipped with dark seen from below, looking transparent in the summer sun like mother of pearl inlaid with jet.

Mrs. Clare having disliked the water, it was the first time that Cecil had ever been on the sea. The dancing motion of the boat as it bounded over the waves, now dipping and now rising gracefully, inspired her with a deep, yet dreamy delight; to her it seemed the very poetry of action; and when to this was added the brightness of a glorious day in June, one of those few glorious days that June gives us now and then to stop the mouths of grumblers; and bold, and

striking scenery, she forgot for a time her cares and trials—remembered not that there was such a person in existence as Mrs. Ford ; and lost herself in a poet's golden dream of bliss.

“La ! how pretty ; just like the centre dish at Mrs. Hawton's supper,” from Susan Ford, and her mother's order from the other boat to “draw down her veil, or she would get frightfully freckled,” recalled Cecil from her poetic visions to the wearing realities of life.

Pretty ! to apply such a term, and in such a voice to those stately cliffs !—and to liken them to the sugared toy of a supper table ! Five minutes before Cecil had rejoiced at having been compelled to form one in the expedition ; and now she almost regretted it. To have our bright imaginings shocked by such silly nothings is almost worse than to be ever dead to lofty thoughts and poet's dreams.

She was scarcely sorry when the order was given for the boats to veer round and repass the Needles, as the party were to return and

land in Alum Bay; and yet her head was turned back to catch a parting glimpse—her attention only diverted from those stately cliffs, by a little vessel further to the eastward, whose white sails glistening in the sun, and picturesquely arranged, gave her the appearance of some beauteous bird from foreign climes, breasting the waves with ease and grace.

“What vessel is that?” asked Mr. Beckington Ford.

“It is an R. Y. C., sir; but I don’t think it is any of our yachts hereabouts,” replied one of the boatmen.

“I think it is the *Miranda*, as was built at Portsmouth,” said the other, shading his eyes to catch a better view. “Sir Thomas Willerton’s now, sir; it was built for his uncle the old Barrownight.”

“Sir Thomas Willerton! Oh! that is the handsome young man whom we met on board the steam-packet; the friend of the rich young lord who was so very civil to us all;” remarked

Miss Ford, breaking off a flirtation with Lieut. Swanwick, an officer in the Preventive Service, to whose flatteries she lent a willing ear, when no better match was present. "Is she coming this way?" she added eagerly.

"I should say that her destination was Christchurch; but some gentlemen steer their own yachts; and then I never presume to give an opinion as to their course," replied Lieutenant Swanwick, vexed at the sudden pause in the flirtation, and feeling a thorough seaman's contempt for amateur sailors.

"Going to Christchurch;" repeated Miss Ford in a tone of disappointment.

"Going to Christchurch?" repeated Cecil to herself, with something of the same feeling; and yet why she regretted the Miranda's going to Christchurch she would have found it difficult to tell. She had never seen that yacht before—she had never heard its master's name—she could not hope, even as a mere matter of curiosity, to go over it, should it follow in their

wake; and she had certainly no desire to make acquaintance with the young baronet; and yet, from some strange association of ideas, she felt disappointed that the *Miranda* was going to Christchurch.

We are no descendants of *Edipus*—no reader of riddles; and never pretend to understand the windings of a woman's mind:—the labyrinth of *Minos* might be more easily explored even without a clue, than the labyrinth of a woman's thoughts. We would spread no scandal of our own sex; but verily the conclusions at which a woman's heart arrives, are not to be reached by any ordinary course of reasoning, strange and startling as such conclusions sometimes are; they are not more strange and startling than the steps—the wide and broken steps—the unseen, unguessed, links by which faint hopes and dawning doubts, first far apart, approach, then spread—and deepen into conviction.

The *Tempest* had ever been one of Cecil's

favourite plays ;—the character of Ariel is so full of the poetry of the imagination, that of Miranda so full of the poetry of the affections ; so simple—so pitiful—so confiding. This might account for her interest in the yacht bearing her favourite's name. It might—or it might not ;—we give no judgment in the matter, having, as we before hinted, no inclination to bewilder ourselves in the labyrinth of a woman's thoughts—or fancies, should thoughts be considered too grand a name.

The boats shot again round the outermost rock—the Miranda was hid from view by the projecting point of the island—and the whole party were soon safely landed in Alum Bay. Some sauntered along the beach, picking up pebbles and sea weed, some went to examine the fine white sand so famed and so sought, for making china ; whilst others ran a risk of getting cricks in their necks by staring up at the high and various coloured cliffs, as they passed on to the spring of fresh pure water,

that wells out of the rocks, streaming across the narrow beach, and mingling with the sea, nearly at the point where the line of the bold chalky headland falls back on the darker ground almost at right angles, forming a sheltered nook. Each and all strolled about at their pleasure, and nearly all well pleased; for, thanks to Mr. Beckington Ford's three bachelor recruits, with the exception of Cecil and the two younger girls, "every lass had a spark," on whose arm to lean in climbing; and into whose ears to pour their nothings, pretty, or not pretty; and a governess and girls under sixteen could not expect beaux;—they were nobodies, undeserving the services of the lords of the creation; so the party might be considered complete, each furnished with a fitting companion. Jemima, who not only chose to consider herself a woman, but desired that others should do the same, was the only one who looked glum; and her frown vanished when she found that the youngest Miss Hatton

made no objection to her sharing the attentions and arms of Mr. Saunders, a young navy surgeon. As for Cecil and Lotty, on they trudged, hand in hand, gaily and lovingly; now watching the advancing waves that wooed the sparkling beach with a gentle whisper, retreating as they touched their feet—now scrambling over broken rocks to collect the bright coloured sands, or peep into tiny ravines making sport of the rough shingles;—sipping of the crystal stream—flitting hither and thither—seeing all things before any body else, because they thought only of seeing; and not at all of flirting.

The almost perpendicular ascent just in the corner of the nook, where the bare white headland fell against the darker cliffs of more fantastic form, being proclaimed by general consent too perilous and fatiguing, back streamed the straggling party along the beach towards the more usual road, a narrow path up the side of a deep and irregular ravine, with

jutting pieces of rock above and below. This was not Lotty's first visit to the Island, and she and Miss Clare led the way as before, laughing as they scrambled on, unconscious of the jests of some of the party, who were much amused at the contrast formed by the slight agile figure of Cecil and the short awkward one of Lotty, who despite of stumbling and panting, contrived to keep pace with her active companion.

What a different creature was Cecil Clare on that island shore, to what she generally seemed in the dull school-room at Oakfield Villa ! There was a life and energy ; a buoyancy of spirit in every movement—a brightness in her speaking eye, that none had seen before ; and which would have excited wonder and remark from her cousins, had they not been more pleasantly engaged. Mr. Farnell, on whose arm leant Susan Ford, was struck with the grace of her movements, the animation of her manner, and the delicate bloom with which

exercise and pleasure had tinted her cheeks; and felt a great desire to change places with Lotty; but there was no getting rid of his accomplished companion; who drew without taste—sang without feeling—and conversed without ideas; so for the present at least he was fain to submit to his lot, and flatter Susan to her humour's bent.

Cecil had consented to go for Lotty's sake, because it was Lotty's birthday; a dull look, or heavy step would have spoilt Lotty's pleasure; and the warm hearted girl who stood alone in her kindness should see nothing but smiles—hear nothing but laughter—and never guess the sighs and tears of the preceding night thought Cecil, and threw herself heart and mind, as it were, for the time being, into the spirit of the scene, resolutely chasing away every gloomy remembrance, and basking in the flood of golden sunshine that spread over sea and land with the gladsome humour of a happy child. For one day at least she would

turn no thought on the past ; but hold as stern a rule o'er memory as memory too often held o'er her. She would enjoy one happy day. Alas ! who can say that with impunity ? The resolve has often been made ; from the time of Seged down to the present ;—but when has such a resolve, if made by one of quick sensibilities and ardent imagination been fulfilled ? Duty or business may satisfy the mind ; but when did a party of pleasure content the heart ? And memory will be avenged, and re-assert its rule. Little did Cecil think ere the rise of another sun with what tyrant might the past should rush upon her mind !—what pangs should teach her that let her jest and laugh as she would this was not—could not be a happy day.

“ Now, dear Cecil, let us run up here before any of the others come ; and I will show you a nice seat where you can see all over the bay, and draw the rocks, and our little boats, and every thing,” cried Lotty, dragging her cousin

up the steep path, that led through the narrow gorge, twisting and turning, yet ever ascending, till it came out on the down above. "There now come to the left:"—and after some scrambling, and more laughing, Cecil was seated by her puffing, panting guide on the point of rock from whence, as her cousin had promised, she could look over the whole bay with the Hampshire coast, and Hurst Castle and its lighthouse on the right.

The remainder of the party were still loitering on the beach; for as it was to be a thoroughly idle day, and no one took upon himself the command, hurrying the rest to do nothing, all sauntered on as they liked, killing time as pleasantly as they could till dinner should be ready.

"I am so happy, Cecil! so very happy!" cried Lotty, seating herself at her cousin's feet; but so turned that she could look up in her face. "Are not you happy too?"

"Yes:" replied Cecil, but in a graver tone

than she had used that day ; for the spell of the scene 'was on her :—she was no longer Lotty's merry playfellow ; but a high souled woman, holding communion with the grand and great—full of soft sympathies, and glowing thoughts—reading the secrets of the earth and sea, and thrilling at their touching tones, unseen, unheard by duller spirits.

To many nature hath no tongue—her warnings and her witching music fall on dull ears, or are not understood ;—she hath a language none can learn from salaried masters—a grammar of her own, not found in printed books. Love—only love can comprehend her glorious mysteries !—love, only love can read her secrets ! Nature reveals herself to those alone who worship her as the creation of Almighty will and power, whose majesty is dimly shadowed forth in her transcendent beauty. Cecil was one of nature's worshippers and ever felt her beauties with a grateful, breathless awe.

To those around her nature was as a sealed book;—they might look at the binding, and be in petty raptures at the gorgeous gilding; but they knew nothing of the higher beauties to be found within;—its language was to them an unknown tongue—its spirit above their comprehension.

“What makes you look so different sometimes to what you do at others?” asked the wondering Lotty, after gazing for some moments into Cecil’s face. “You are looking like nobody else just now, as if your eyes would speak.”

“What then, Lotty? did you never hear of speaking eyes before?” asked her cousin gaily, roused from her dream of poesy.

“Mr. Farnell said something about it one day to Susan that I did not understand; but I wish you would laugh, and make me laugh, cousin, for I like you much better when you are merry. I seem to feel now as if you could

not love such a stupid creature as I am. Or will you make the sketch you promised me?—here is the book.”

“ Yes, Lotty; and try to laugh too; but, believe me, I love you quite as much when I look grave. It would have made a better sketch from below; but since you will have it from hence—so be it.”

“ You can see more here, cousin.”

“ More water certainly.”

“ And I like the water so much! dancing up in such pretty waves. I wonder what is at the bottom of the sea. Should not you like to be a mermaid, Cecil, and go down to the very bottom?”

“ No, Lotty; for I am sure you would follow, and tread on my tail.”

“ Oh! Cecil, how droll you are to-day!” cried Lotty with a burst of childish laughter.

“ Mind you are to draw every thing, even the gulls and cormorants on that shingle island,

walking about looking so grave, as if they were trying to seem clever."

"They are vexed because you are laughing at them ; and no living thing likes to be laughed at."

"But I cannot help laughing at them they look so funny. Oh ! you have done my sketch ; and so like ! The rocks, and the sea, and the little boaties, all just as they are. But do put in a few birds, Cecil."

"And a mermaid in the corner with you treading on her tail ?" asked her cousin archly.

"No, no ; Beckington and Jemima would make such fun. Oh ! you have put in the gulls ; and it is so like—so exactly like !" cried the delighted girl, clapping her hands with glee, as she turned from the spirited sketch to the view ; and then back to the sketch. "But look, Cecil ! look at that pretty vessel coming round the point. Do draw her for me with her sails all set ; and the red flag at the top, and

the white foam before her? Is not she pretty?
How I should like to be in her!"

"Beautiful!" cried Cecil as she watched the well trimmed vessel, after dashing past the point, make a graceful sweep half round the bay, then anchor exactly opposite the spot on which she sat. "How proudly she seems to ride the waves, as though they were her subjects! Where can she come from?"

"I don't know that, cousin; but I can see that she belongs to the Royal Yacht Club from her red barge, and golden letters. I have learnt that from Lieutenant Swanwick; and I can tell that she is a cutter too," replied Lotty, proud of her knowledge.

"How nicely you have drawn her for me! I do believe she is the Miranda that you looked at so much, and seemed so sorry to leave on the other side of the rocks. See! they have lowered the boat, and two gentlemen are getting into her."

"It is the Miranda," said Cecil catching the

name* as the cutter veered round, the colour involuntarily deepening on her cheek as she continued to gaze.

On came the boat towards the shore, propelled by two stout rowers neatly dressed, everything about the vessel showing that the owner of the *Miranda* was something of a dandy, as far as concerned his yacht; and no sooner did the keel grate on the sand than the two young men, who had sat in the stern, looking through their glasses at those on the cliffs sprang lightly on the beach; and turned towards the ravine, which led to the higher ground.

The first who leapt on shore was of middling height, and fair complexion; neither strikingly handsome in face, nor strikingly symmetrical in figure, but with a light and active step, and features strongly expressive of gay, good humour and ready kindness.

The second was rather taller, and more finely formed, with features which, though not strictly

* In those days the name might be seen on the stern and flag.

regular, were singularly attractive, when lit up, as they sometimes were, by the sudden flashing of thought or feeling; and then his eyes shone bright as some lustrous jewel in a dark mine; but generally their expression was earnest and grave, some fancied haughty; and he was not usually as popular as his more lively friend, whose blue eye glanced and glistened with infectious merriment.

Cecil watched them as they crossed the beach;—she saw the shorter one address some question to the servants, then turn to his companion with a gesture, which she considered as expressive of pleasure;—she bent over the cliff, till her head grew giddy, to catch a last glimpse of their forms as they approached the entrance to the ravine, then, drawing a deep breath, she sat still and silent, her eyes fixed on the ground, perfectly unconscious that the rest of the party were standing on the different points of rock around her; not exactly by her side, but only at a little distance, watching the

Miranda; and, like herself, speculating on the persons and purposes of the two young men brought on shore by her boat.

Lotty was standing a few steps off, showing her sketch to Mrs. Hatton; and Cecil was left with a beating heart, sometimes turning a timid, furtive glance towards the path below, just at the point where any one ascending would be first visible. It was singular that she should have felt such a strong and unaccountable desire that the Miranda should follow the boats instead of proceeding to Christchurch. And now that the Miranda was there before her, what could—what should it matter, to her? Why was her heart beating so wildly—and why was she listening so anxiously—so breathlessly for the tread of those ascending that narrow path?

“It is the Miranda; and I dare say one of those young men is Sir Thomas Willerton. I thought you said she was steering for Christchurch, Swanwick,” cried Beckington Ford,

looking through the glass of which he generally managed to possess himself.

“It is the *Miranda* certainly; but I told you that I never pretended to foretell the course of these baby vessels, and amateur sailors,” replied the Lieutenant by no means pleased with Miss Ford’s delight at the prospect of meeting Sir Thomas Willerton; for Mr. Ford’s fortune was somehow or other reported at treble its real amount. “I dare say the owner thinks he is at Portland, or Beachy Head; any where but where he is.”

“I have not a doubt that Sir Thomas Willerton understands navigation thoroughly; and I shall have great pleasure in meeting him again; for he and his friend seemed exceedingly polite and gentlemanly young men, and showed us great attention when we visited Portsmouth,” observed Mrs. Ford in a rebuking tone, for to her it sounded little short of treason to impute ignorance on any subject to a man of rank, descending a few steps as she

spoke, so as to stand immediately above the path where the Baronet must pass.

Cecil heard none of the remarks of those around her; but her quick and anxious ear caught the tread, and the laugh, and the murmured tones of those coming up the ravine;—then those murmured tones grew more distinct; and she caught enough to fill up the following sentences, for the breeze bore the sounds towards her; and one of the speakers at least spoke in no whisper.

“I must make acquaintance with the beautiful Medora, perched so picturesquely on that point of rock; so it is of no use attempting to turn me, Fitz Elwyn. You know you started yourself, struck with her loveliness.”

“Do as you please, Willerton; I will walk on to the lighthouse.”

“No, my good fellow; you must stay and introduce me, for pushing a basket out of Mrs. Ford’s way, which was all I did, will scarcely entitle me to claim her acquaintance,

at of her daughter; but you handed them
the boat, in which I would have assisted
had I suspected what face was hid under
ugly bonnet. Positively you must intro-
me to this sea gazing nymph, who has
my heart already."

"This is folly, Willerton! do come on to the
house."

"Not I;—introduce me."

"I cannot: she is no daughter of Mrs.
's."

"Oh! if you do not know her yourself that
other matter. But never mind; introduce
to the old lady, and I will manage the rest."
"I was never introduced to her myself."

"Nonsense!" cried the Baronet interrupting
impatiently. "Did not you hand her and
daughter into the boat from the steam
jet? and did not she vow eternal gratitude?
a, man! you are too modest. As if a hand-
e young Viscount, and a rich young
onet, both bachelors, might not do as they

please with mothers and daughters. Now having recovered our breath, let us on to the adventure."

Cecil heard—and wished to hear, no more. She had listened with that breathless eagerness which makes the listener giddy;—she was sitting on a projecting point hanging over a vast depth below—she felt her head grow dizzy, and creeping a step from the edge to a safer seat, she resolutely closed her eyes and bowed her head on her knees, so that none could see her face. She saw not Mrs. Ford's cordial reception of the two strangers—she heard not her exaggerated and sycophantic thanks for their former slight civilities, and her call on her daughters to join in the expression of pleasure at the meeting;—the first words that struck on her ear, or rather that conveyed any distinct meaning to her mind, formed part of that lady's reply to a question from Sir Thomas Willerton.

"Oh! that is only my governess;—a poor cousin, who has no other home."

the contemptuous tone might have stung a keener spirit than Cecil's into anger. No more home!—And such a home!

"I congratulate you on having so fair a cousin; and must beg you to introduce me to my friend to your lovely relative," said Sir Thomas purposely loud enough for Cecil to hear; and with a manner which coming from a wealthy young baronet, Mrs. Ford dared not gainsay.

She could not however so far control her indignation as to perform the introduction gracefully. "Lotty, tell Miss Clare, I want her," Cecil heard the message; but she stirred not—spoke not—even when Lotty repeated the message close into her ear.

"We should go to the lady not summon her," observed Sir Thomas assisting Mrs. Ford to climb the rugged slope, on the ridge of which Cecil was seated, followed by Lord Fitzglyn, much to that lady's annoyance, who could not help muttering.

"I hate people in her situation giving themselves airs."

"Miss Clare, these gentlemen do you the honor of desiring an introduction. Viscount Fitz Elwyn, Sir Thomas Willerton," said Mrs. Ford with a manner meant to overwhelm her governess.

Cecil had risen just as they approached; and either from an inadvertent look below, or the irregularity of the piece of rock on which she stood, she staggered and might have fallen over the cliff, had not the affectionate Lotty caught her dress with a firm grasp.

Some of the young ladies considered this a fitting occasion for uttering interesting little screams; and Mrs. Ford began to rebuke her governess for choosing such a dangerous situation; but ere the echoes of the screams had died away among the reverberating rocks, or the rebuke was a quarter ended, Cecil had returned the bows of the gentlemen; and was standing firmly erect, with a cheek nearly as

as the chalken cliffs beyond ; but a de-
our coldly self-possessed. Neither of the
gers could have been in time to have
ed her had they seen her danger, which
o instantaneous ; and the viscount, front-
er with a mien as proud and cold as her
made no remark on her late peril ; but
thomas poured forth a thousand congratu-
s on Lotty's timely clutch, indulging in
than his usual flattering hyperboles when
essing ladies, from the annoyance he saw
sed Mrs. Ford ; yet, amid all the exagge-
n and apparent affectation of some of his
ses, there was evident so much real kind-
of heart ; and the *empressement* of his
ner, which was at the same time perfectly
ectful, was so very pleasing—so very flat-
g, when contrasted with the cold stateli-
of his companion, particularly to one situ-
like Cecil, that, after the first few opening
ences she met his endeavours towards a
er acquaintance with the frankness of one

willing to please, and to be pleased. That the baronet should bestow his attentions on her poor cousin was however very contrary to the will and wishes of Mrs. Ford, who, to break off their conversation, insisted on an immediate renewal of their walk to the lighthouse.

"You will join our party I trust, and partake of our dinner," she added, turning to the strangers.

"With the greatest pleasure," replied the baronet, leaving his friend no time for objection.

"You are very good; I shall consider this one of the most fortunate days of my life," cried the delighted Mrs. Ford, who showed no delicacy in her scheming. "Ann, my dear, suppose you lead the way, and show Lord Fitz Elwyn the path we always take; and which is so much easier than the one generally followed. I must beg you, Miss Clare, to take care of Lotty and Jemima; and pray do not let them run about so wildly as you did just

; but keep hold of their hands: I was
terrified. I will confide you to Susan,
Thomas, she makes an excellent guide."

Thank you, Mrs. Ford; but I know every
of these parts, and will take care of Miss
e, who still looks pale and requires sup-
," replied the baronet offering his arm, as
poke, to assist Cecil down the slope, who,
ng the kindness which dictated the offer,
it with gratitude, repaying his attentions
aking herself as agreeable as she could
g the walk.

That cannot be:—I must entreat you to
on a mother's fears, Sir Thomas. I cannot
to see Jemima run about these wild places
erself."

Oh! do not fuss yourself about me, mam-
Mr. Swanwick will take much better care
e than Miss Clare, who has shown her-
so giddy," cried the flippant Jemima,
d of her beau, who had been thrown off

by her eldest sister at the appearance of the viscount and his friend.

Some of the party laughed ; and Mrs. Ford was obliged to yield the point.

"Come with me, Lotty," said Cecil, holding out her hand to the affectionate child.

"You had better come round to this other side ; I can support you better than Miss Clare, who needs an arm herself," observed Sir Thomas.

Lotty hesitated for a moment, abashed by the address of a stranger, then, encouraged by his good-humoured smile, accepted his offer.

CHAPTER VIII.

"How slow you are, Fitz Elwyn; I shall
win off the prize, whilst you are only getting
ready for the race," cried Sir Thomas, coming
up to his friend.

"So it appears; therefore, to avoid defeat,
I will not enter the lists against you," replied
Fitz Elwyn in a far more stately tone than
usual on the occasion.

"As you please, Fitz, we shall reach the
goal whether you do or not. 'Faint heart

never won fair lady,' nor climbed high mountain ; so good bye," said the baronet, passing on at a brisk pace.

" Good bye ;" repeated his friend ; but at the same time quickening his own pace so as to keep but a little way behind him, a station he maintained during the whole ascent to the lighthouse, which was less fatiguing than usual, owing to the recent fall of rain ; for the short turf becomes very slippery in dry weather.

Mr. and Mrs. Hatton having no great taste for sights that required climbing steep hills, declared their intention of sitting down among the rocks till the return of the young party, and their host and hostess felt compelled to remain with them, and play the polite ; so the baronet was left in undisputed possession of his Medora as he had termed her, with whom he became more and more enchanted every minute ; laying aside whilst conversing with her much of the complimentary and affected phraseology,

disfigured his conversation with other
m.

re was Cecil toiling up a hill in the Isle
ght, side by side, though not arm in arm,
hat very Lord Fitz Elwyn, who had been
ted day after day for the last six weeks
ndmoor, in the county of——! Here
ood for thought; but Cecil was resolved
t moment not to think;—or at least not
rd Fitz Elwyn; so she went on talking
r Thomas Willerton with an overflowing
, almost amounting to the giddiness of
Jemima had accused her.

ere we are, Miss Clare, arrived at the
nation of our Herculean labours, standing
n the balcony of this wondrous light-
, and rewarded with a bird's-eye view of
nd land. It is all very well climbing,
never see a hill without feeling an irre-
le desire to stand on the top of it; but,
een you and me and the cat, Miss Clare,

in my opinion, toiling for a view is very much like toiling for honours;—the sole pleasure is anticipation—success brings disappointment. In short, climbing a hill is a good moral to ambition, if ambition would but profit by it. The great man looks down with contempt from his elevated position on the pigmies below; whilst the pigmies below after having got a crick in the neck from gazing up at the great man, decide that he looks no greater than themselves. I will have none of your honours—no not I, I will be neither statesman nor hero; king nor kaiser; but simple Sir Thomas Willerton, with a blazing fire—a good dinner—a bottle of champagne—a trusty friend—and a loving, lovely wife:—a man whom all shall envy in their hearts, though they may not praise me with their tongues.”

“ You forget the old chivalric rule of ‘ *place aux dames*,’ and name the lady last,” said Cecil gaily.

the crowning blessing of all;—the top of the pyramid. Does not Lindley say that the most important object is placed last? Do not the inferior members of the royal family precede the king and queen?

“very sophistically argued;” observed Lord Elwyn, who had ascended immediately to his friend and was now with Miss Ford sitting close at his elbow. “Remember my assertion, that faint heart never won fair play; yet you seem to expect that this crown-setting—this top stone of the pyramid—this placing which by the way I daresay the ladies found a ticklish job) is to drop from the ladies into her chair by the side of the blazing fire, since you protest against the toil of setting her.”

“Only the toil of seeking honors. Shame on the man, who thinks it a toil to seek fair play for his wife’s love. Not that I should dawdle

about it as you would, Fitz ; I agree with the old proverb :—

“ Happy’s the wooing,
That’s not long adoing.”

“ Are you of the same opinion, Miss Clare ?” asked Fitz Elwyn abruptly—his first remark since their introduction.

“ Oh no ! certainly not ; I am for all such affairs being carried on in proper order,” replied Cecil with spirit, after a moment’s hesitation and embarrassment. “ The papas and mammas should first meet to discuss whether it will be a fitting match ;—equal rank and wealth on both sides—or wealth sufficient to purchase title upon one ; and title willing to be purchased on the other. Then all these preliminaries being duly arranged, the gentleman may be permitted to say—‘ will you have me ?’—and the young lady to whisper—‘ ask my parents ?’—The most material points being thus secured, the young couple must be happy.”

Oh, Miss Clare ! to think of your making money a bargain !—a debtor and creditor ! I hoped to find you very romantic,” said Sir Thomas, surprised at her reply, as he had a vague idea contained some meaning.

Expect no romance from me ; I am too old to be romantic. It is all very fine to talk of living in a cottage ; but they only can afford to practise it, who have fortunes sufficient to buy large houses, and keep carriages and servants.”

“I should be quite shocked could I believe you mean what you say ; and turn heretic at once.”

“Do :—think of the delight your ghost would experience in beholding the statues erected to his honor ! A sturdy figure in what is called a Roman toga, looking like a burly, vulgar fellow in his cassock, standing on a heavy pedestal ;—or placed on the top of a pillar, looking like a knob on a walking stick—or, en

cavalier with modish coat and queue, sitting as perfectly unconcerned at the dangerous prancing of your *destrier* as though you were philosopher, as well as hero."

"Oh, shocking! Cruel Miss Clare! To talk of my spirit walking the earth, when it is well known to the merest tyro in ghostology that none but the murdered or their murderers snuff this upper air, all the peaceable and well disposed sleeping calmly in their graves. I am too much horrified at the bare idea to continue the subject; and shall proceed to play cicerone at once, to prevent your imagining any more mischief against me," exclaimed the laughing baronet. "Look here! we will finish this droll little Island first. There is Fresh Water Bay; but you have seen that I suppose; and all the other lions of the neighbourhood."

"I have seen no lions but those to which I have been introduced to-day; this is my first excursion."

"Indeed! and yet you have been more than

month at Milford. How comes this ? Are you not curious in these matters ?”

“It is you who are curious, Sir Thomas. I am a lady for a reason, when you told me only a few minutes since that you thoroughly understood our sex?—a phrase, which, from a gentleman, always means that women are the very reverse of what is reasonable—made up of folly and frivolity.”

“Fie upon you, Miss Clare ; for such a lesson on the politeness and penetration of us gentlemen ; you must learn to judge better of your own conduct, and to induce you to form a more favorable opinion, and compel you to listen to my advice, I insist on conveying you to Freshwater Bay to-morrow in the *Miranda*, taking care to provide proper chaperons, party, &c. Now you are fond of the water.”

“Bribery and corruption ! I am far too moral to encourage either,” cried Cecil laughing.

“Nay, but you will go. Will you not ?”

said Sir Thomas earnestly, his whole manner proving how much he desired her presence.

"I am much obliged for your kind wish to give me pleasure; but cannot avail myself of it," replied Cecil with a sudden gravity, knowing that she really meant what she said.

"Why not?" enquired Sir Thomas eagerly.

"I cannot—indeed I cannot," replied Cecil, whilst a touching sadness overshadowed her former gaiety, the effect of some painful remembrance, as after an involuntary glance at Miss Ford and Lord Fitz Elwyn, she sank on the ground.

The baronet marked that lightning glance and sudden change; he saw too that she sought for support to the rail of the balcony, and guessed that a dread of unpleasant comment from Mrs. Ford and her daughters caused her refusal. Too delicate to put further questions, and sincerely pitying her dependent situation, he merely said:—"I shall see to that," in a tone so low that Cecil might note it or not.

ceased; and then proceeded to conclude
as cicerone.

There is the sea, as you may perhaps per-

I would I could point out to you
s and Mermaids, but Nereids and Mer-
like the tricks of children and dogs, are
forthcoming when called for; so we will
without them. There is Christchurch
and—”

h! I have told Cecil all that, as we walked
the beach,” cried Lotty interrupting him.

You do right to stop me then; I always
repetitions, as boy or man; so now look
north over the intervening space, and
glance at the New Forest in the distance.
see the Conqueror sweeping through its
with his gallant train of Norman Knights,
shes of its smoking cottages crashing be-
his horse's hoofs; and the mournful
of the houseless wanderers coming on his
from the depths of the sheltering woods;
picture to yourself some forty years later

a merry hunting party bursting through the coverts headed by that very Conqueror's son, laid low in the ardour of pursuit:—an atonement it should seem, for the wrongs of the peasants driven forth to form a royal chace. Was not that what you said the other day, Fitz Elwyn, when we lay stretched on the moss in one of its leafy bowers? I hope I have not spoilt it by repetition, though to tell the truth I felt much more inclined to sleep at that moment than to listen to your eloquence, or fancy William the Conqueror, and his mailed Barons parading through the depopulated chace. I shall get into disgrace I see, if I attempt to discourse on the sunny glades and shady bowers; the mossy turf, and stately trees, with their lights and their shades, and their waving branches, rustling in the breeze—the humming of the bees, amid the gorse—the tapping of the brilliant woodpecker—the shrill scream of the pretty jay—the sportive cry of the nimble squirrel, as he springs from

gh to bough—and the delicious fragrance, the low thrilling murmur that has no words amid those deep, rich woods of the old Forest, which two last by the way, I had never discover, so I entreat you to take the Saga. I have heard you say a thousand things that none but a forester could ever properly describe the charms of his childhood's life."

Perhaps none but a forester can feel them, Elberton; and there rests the secret of all living tales; to affect others we must be true to ourselves. But you have displayed an unusual eloquence on the subject that I will not trouble Miss Clare with a longer description, since my personal feelings could in no way interest her, and would only make her laugh," replied Fitz Elwyn his gaze fixed on the spoke on the place of his birth, left early, never forgotten, and ever loved.

"Nay, Fitz; I will try and be grave for once. I own to preferring streets, houses, and

people, to trees, squirrels, and bogs ; but then I am very liberal in matters of taste, and if an old woman prefers a china monster to the *Diane de la Beche*, I would on no account endeavour to disturb her judgment. So begin ; I daresay Miss Clare will understand and sympathise with your feelings, though I, ~~varies~~, as I am, cannot. Won't you Miss Clare ?”

“ I neither seek, nor expect sympathy from Miss Clare,” replied Fitz Elwyn proudly. “ My feelings towards the Forest partake of the reverent affection of a child, and the more joyous, yet as lasting love of the brother ;—something of the deep passion of the Indian for his native woods ; and this none but a forester can feel or comprehend. There is a something almost holy to me in its shadowy depths—its sunny lawns, and heathy wilds ; for they come upon me with the spell of my childhood, bringing back to my mind some touch of affection, some glowing vision, or some lofty thought.”

Capital ! I knew I should pique you into
nity," exclaimed the light hearted baronet.
I may guess from this, Miss Clare, what
sequence would be in the scene of his
res. We will make a party there, Fitz ;
coax Mrs. Ford to bring all her particu-
lends, and Miss Clare shall be consigned
ly to your charge, and you shall try if
an persuade her to abandon the busy
s of men, for :—

' Leafy bower and murmuring rill,'

h she is too lively to give you a hope of
a triumph."

Excuse me," answered Fitz Elwyn abrupt-
I shall make no attempt to induce Miss
to forego the admiration, which she is so
calculated to inspire ; nor would I
gly listen to silly babblings amid the
s of nature."

Nothing personal I hope, Fitz, in your
ks. I ought to have remembered that

reverse, though Miss Ford did not perceive it. They found the elders all ready for their dinner, which was only waiting their return; and the clatter of knives and forks, with the difficulty of helping, holding and sitting on the uneven ground, and consequent complaints thereof, prevented for a time all further discourse. Mrs. Ford made another attempt to separate the baronet from Cecil; but finding Sir Thomas resolutely bent on retaining his station next her, contented herself with securing Fitz Elwyn as a neighbour to her eldest daughter; and edging in her second on the other side of his friend, who however seemed to have no eyes or thought save for Miss Clare.

By the time that the gentlemen had concluded their wine, and the servants and boatmen had demolished the fragments of the dinner, Mr. Ford, who was afraid of catching cold, and who always took care of number one, (leaving all other numbers to take care of

elves) declaring that it was time to go began walking towards the boats. The people pleaded for delay, but Mr. Ford's was irresistible ; so the beaux again offered arms to the belles, and assisted them the narrow shelving path to the beach, the boats were ready to receive them.

"You really must accompany us to Oakfield and allow me to return the great civility received at Portsmouth," observed Mrs. in her most winning tone. "I am afraid not offer you beds ; but it will be a lovely , and I daresay we shall be able to get little dance."

"We shall be most happy," replied Sir as, before she had concluded her invitation, turning a pleading look on his friend, merely bowed.

The party had now to be distributed among the boats, as that belonging to the Miranda was to proceed to Key Haven, and there await the return of the young men from Oakfield

Villa. In the first departed Miss Hatton and her sister, Mr. Ford, Mr. Beckington Ford, Jemima and Mr. Saunders, whom that young lady showed a strong inclination to appropriate to herself. The next in order of filling was the boat from the yacht; and Lord Fitz Elwyn stood at the bow handing in the ladies, who were to freight her, and doing the honors, whilst Sir Thomas lingered on the way to secure a passage with Cecil. It was delightful to be handed along the plank by a lord!—so in stepped Mrs. Ford, and in stepped Miss Ford, leaving a space between them; and in would step Mr. Hatton, whom mother and daughter could scarcely keep out of the purposely vacant space; and then in stepped Miss Susan Ford and Mr. Farnell, the latter being requested to make haste on account of the state of the tide, and a probable change of wind.

“I must trouble you to take charge of Lotty, and Miss Clare in the other boat, since our

and friends must go in their own ;" observed Mrs. Ford, addressing Mr. Farnell.

"Not at all:" cried Lord Fitz Elwyn. "Stay where you are, Mr. Farnell, if you please ; and there is room for you ;" he added turning to Mr. Swanwick, as that gentleman appeared supporting Mrs. Hatton.

The look and the hint were enough for the lieutenant ; he could avenge himself on Mrs. Ford and Miss Ford by separating the latter from the viscount, if he could do nothing more ; so he sprang in without a comment, taking the seat left for his lordship.

Mrs. Ford remonstrated, declaring that she would not think of turning Lord Fitz Elwyn and Sir Thomas Willerton out of their own boat, and that she must go with dear Mrs. Hatton ; but her remonstrances and declarations were all in vain :—at a sign from the viscount, the rowers dipped their oars in the water ; and he went the little Miranda to the great vexation of some of her passengers.

"I must entreat you to accept me as your esquire, Mrs. Hatton;" said Lord Fitz Elwyn addressing that lady with the respectful politeness he ever showed to age, particularly when allied to good nature as in the present instance.

"Your lordship is very kind to take care of an old woman like me;—but would not you rather be with the young people?"

"I have chosen you for my lady fair, so pray do not reject my attendance," replied his lordship with playful gallantry.

"I am too proud of the honor to do that;" said the gratified Mrs. Hatton.

"You deserve a crown for managing so cleverly," whispered Sir Thomas to the viscount, as they were helping to arrange the plank for the ladies.

"A martyr's let it be then."

The baronet looked up at the strange tone of the reply, then, catching, as he believed, his meaning, answered gaily; "yes; a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Ford is martyrdom."

"Never mind what the boatmen say Miss
are, we shall have a pleasant voyage home ;
need not tremble I assure you," said Sir
omas, as he stood on one side of the plank
dy to assist Cecil into the boat, whilst Lord
Elwyn stood with an extended hand on the
her for the same purpose.

"I am not afraid," replied Cecil; and as if to
prove the truth of her assertion, she trod the
ank with a quick step, never touching Lord
Elwyn's hand, and sprang into the boat
where Mrs. Hatton and Lotty were already seated.
The baronet took a seat by her side—his
end one exactly opposite ; and the third
iff was soon in the wake of the other two.
Mrs. Hatton said little—his lordship seemed of
the same humour ; and Lotty was happy in
listening to dear Cecil, and Sir Thomas Willer-
son, who did all he could to engross his fair
companion's attention.

The viscount was in hopes that, being in
the last boat, the rest of the party would have

walked on towards Oakfield Villa immediately on disembarking ; but Mrs. Ford having also her hopes on the subject lingered near the landing place with her eldest daughter ; so that his lordship, though persisting in giving one arm to Mrs. Hatton, could not avoid, without positive rudeness, offering the other to Miss Ford ; whilst Sir Thomas more fortunate, or more determined continued to retain his former companions.

“What a happy day this has been to me I grieve that it is drawing to a close,” observed Sir Thomas as the Villa gate appeared in view. “If I might but hope that you have found it half as delightful as I have done, I should mark this day as one of the brightest in life’s calendar.”

“Delightful ;” cried Cecil with a shiver withdrawing her arm from his, and folding her shawl more closely round her.

“Yes, delightful ! May I not hope that you have found it so ?” repeated Sir Thomas. “You may feel it a little cool now, though to me it is

ely evening, or night, for it is between the

Ask Lotty what she has found it. I was
ed to her to make it as delightful as I
," replied Cecil drawing down her veil.

answer to this appeal, Lotty poured forth
childish ecstasies, whilst Sir Thomas said
himself—"This evasion of my question is
ring; she dares not say how happy she
een."

trust we shall have many more such
"he whispered, whilst Lotty held the gate.
heaven forbid!" exclaimed Cecil earnestly.
Heaven forbid, Miss Clare! What am I
nderstand by this earnest exclamation?"
tioned her startled companion.

Nay, Sir 'Thomas, I have heard of the
er of the king's conscience; but I never
heard of the keeper of a baronet's com-
ension; and certainly was not aware of my
appointment to the office," answered Cecil
her former gaiety.

"I would give much to understand your meaning," observed Sir Thomas, vexed at this second evasion.

"Much or little would be thrown away; it is only an old moral, or rule, or whatever it is to be called. Look at the glancing of that lamp against the pillar!—does it not make the darkness of the back ground appear darker still? The brighter the light the deeper the shadow."

"But if every day were bright—then there would be no shadow."

"There are no more bright days for me;" said Cecil with a fixed despondency of look and tone, that shocked her hearer.

"Say not so! there are days, years of brightness," exclaimed the baronet earnestly, gently detaining her as she would have entered the house. "I will persuade Fitz Elwyn to stay longer; and we will have many parties of pleasure—one to-morrow to Fresh Water Bay, which shall be delightful, in spite of Mrs. Ford.

always carry my point," he added, as if to convince her of his power to perform his engagement.

"No, no ! not another such day !" she replied with a quickness, almost amounting to wildness, snatching away the shawl by which he had covered her, she darted into the house at a glance from Mrs. Ford, leaving him to wonder at her changing mood.

"Poor girl ! that woman will harass her to death, she is so quick and sensitive. I will protect her," thought the baronet as he gazed after her receding figure.

The carriage had been ordered to Keyser to bring home some of the party ; and Mrs. Ford was standing at the school-room door when Cecil joined her.

"How dreadfully ill you look, my dear ;" said that lady, in what she considered a most soothing tone, flashing her candle into her husband's eyes so as nearly to blind her. "I saw

you were wofully tired before you left the Island ; but Mr. Ford said there was no vacant seat in the carriage ; or I would have saved you this last walk. I should recommend your keeping your room the rest of the evening ; in fact, going to bed almost immediately. You will be laid up otherwise, and doctors are very expensive, to say nothing of the trouble you give your friends."

" I have a violent headache ; and intend to follow your good advice," replied Cecil coldly.

" That is right my dear ; and shows your good sense," cried Mrs. Ford, delighted at gaining her point so easily ; instead of being compelled to turn her advice into a command as she had expected. " I will send you a cup of tea, and make your excuses should any one enquire after you, which is not likely."

Cecil passed on to her garret, intending to remain there ; but as the under housemaid had been taking her pleasure as well as her betters,

the bed was not even made, she was
d to return to the school-room, and there
ill it should please Betty to complete the
gement of her sleeping apartment.

CHAPTER IX.

Ma. and Mrs. Ford did their best to please their guests, particularly the titled ones ; but the lady saw that their endeavours had not the desired success. Lord Fitz Elwyn looked weary of his host's pompous boasts of visiting the best company—keeping the best horses—giving the best wines—and playing the best game at whist ; and the baronet, instead of smiling at his hostess's flatteries, or lauding her daughter's singing, was turning many anxious glances towards the door.

"I hope Miss Clare is not much tired," he remarked at length, growing impatient at her non-appearance.

"She is gone to bed assigning that as a reason."

A look towards Fitz Elwyn hinted at immediate departure; but Mrs. Ford had resolved on their stay.

"Come, young people, I thought you were going to have a dance," she exclaimed, glancing significantly at Beckington, who, declaring it to be their intention, immediately led out Mrs. Hatton. Mr. Farnell followed his example with her younger sister—Mr. Saunders engaged Jenima; and Miss Ford looked down, rejecting an offer from Lord Fitz Elwyn, who, as he could not now depart, insisted on dancing with the good-natured Lotty, it being her birth-right; so Miss Ford was obliged to put up with Mr. Swanwick, as Sir Thomas took Susan.

There were six couple ready to dance;—but where was the music? Neither Mrs. Hatton,

nor Mrs. Ford could play quadrilles; and the husbands were of course incompetent to the task. Mrs. Ford, declaring that Lotty ought to be in bed, wished to pack her off and make Jemima, whose flirtation with Mr. Saunders she did not approve, play for the rest; but against this there appeared such strong symptoms of rebellion in all the parties concerned that she was obliged in prudence to abandon the idea. Jemima asserted that she could not play; and her sisters admitted the truth of her assertion.

"What shall we do?" asked Susan, delighted with her partner. "Are you sure you cannot play for us, Mrs. Hatton? We would not be particular—you could play any thing."

"My dear, I can play nothing, or would not readily oblige you. But why not ask Miss Clare, who is always willing to lend her assistance when required?"

"Yes Cecil, dear Cecil! she will play for us," cried Lotty delighted at the prospect of dancing.

dancing too with Lord Fitz Elwyn, who
won her heart by some kind questions and
remarks fitting her age.

Mrs. Ford opposed the plan on account of
her headache, and her having retired to
bed, but her opposition was drowned in the
general acclamation at the proposition, and
she, who averred that she was not gone to
bed, set off with Mrs. Hatton to bring her.

Cecil was found by the ambassadors, or
her ambassadresses, leaning her head on her
folded hands, that rested on the table; the
wick of her solitary candle proving it had
not been snuffed since her return; and so com-
pletely was she wrapped up in her own medita-
tions that she did not remark their entrance,
deceived by the dim light, Mrs. Hatton
stepped over a chair.

"What is the matter?" enquired Cecil
looking at her visitors.

"Nothing to frighten you, and make you look
pale," replied Mrs. Hatton. "We are only

come to ask you to play quadrilles for the dancers."

"I am very sorry ; but I have a violent headache, and should have been in bed long since, had my room been ready."

"But since you are not in bed, my dear, I hope you will come ; it will not detain you long."

"Oh, do, Cecil dear!" cried Lotty caressingly, "for I am to dance with Lord Fitz Elwyn, who is so good natured ! And I am sure he likes you, for he seemed so pleased when I told him how much I loved you. It is my birth-day you know ; and mamma will send me to bed directly if you do not come."

"I am very sorry, Lotty ; but I really have such a dreadful headache that I should not know what I was about ; and run one tune into another."

"They would not be very particular as to the tune, my dear Miss Clare ; but I never dreamt of your having such a headache, when I proposed asking you to play. You have been

ly all day that I thought you in unusual
and spirits."

had been lively all day for her own
e, though her head had scarcely been
ce from pain than now ;—and should she
to exert herself for the pleasure of others,
no more was required of her than playing
quadrilles ? She sighed for solitude and
to still the pain that tortured her—she
from meeting those, whom she must
ter in the drawing-room, for Mrs. Ford's
r was ever galling ; but it would be
to refuse.

ou will come—won't you, dear Cecil?"

Lotty seeing her hesitation.

will do my best ; but I really am a poor
only fit for bed," replied Cecil, rising to
pany them.

ou are always kind and obliging, Miss
; and I am sorry I asked you to play, for
re looking very ill ; I see it now that you
ore in the light," said Mrs. Hatton as

they passed near a lamp in their way to the drawing-room.

And Cecil was looking very ill—far different from the Cecil Clare of the morning, or even of an hour since. That hour of thought and self-abandonment had done its work—she was as the ghost of her former self. When none were by the curb had been removed from memory, and memory had laid its iron grasp upon her heart and brow, leaving the traces of its might on both; and she had no longer bonnet or veil to conceal its ravages—not even a curl to shadow a portion of the face, for her straightened hair was now put simply back behind her ears, leaving every feature and passing expression open to observation.

“Thank you for coming to play to us,” said Maria Hatton to Cecil, as she entered the room, “I hope it will not increase your headache.”

“It can scarcely do that; but I am afraid I shall put you out by my mistakes.”

I have been most anxiously watching for your entrance; and now that you are come am inclined to quarrel with my own selfishness in wishing for your presence—your pallid face so plainly speaks your suffering," said Thomas, advancing eagerly to meet her. "You were so playful, so animated up to the moment of our parting, that I could not divine you were being tormented with a headache. What wonderful self-command you must possess!"

"Not so: but action for a time prevents the consciousness of pain; and it is only when exertion is no longer needed that the body yields to suffering. 'This is a very philosophical explanation I flatter myself for my former animation and present stupidity,'" answered Cecil, forcing a smile though the throbbing of her temples was almost intolerable.

"But you are not subject to headaches; you will be well to-morrow—shall you not?" entered the baronet eagerly.

"I am not a prophet as well as a philosopher for the future," she replied with a fur-

ther attempt at gaiety. "My head-aches, as in the present instance, generally arise from over exertion."

"Now that Cecil has come, though against my advice, I must insist on her being kept as quiet as possible ; and not talked to ; her paleness is absolutely frightful," observed Mrs. Ford, stepping between her cousin and her guest, but using a blander tone than she generally employed, when speaking of, or to Miss Clare.

"To your place, Sir Thomas ! we are waiting for you," cried Beckington Ford, clapping his hands to enforce the summons.

Sir Thomas obeyed ; but not till he had placed the music-stool for Cecil—put back the candles, as she complained of the light ; and whispered his regret at not having her for his partner, to which last she replied by assuring him that she was not equal to dancing, a fact he could not doubt when he looked in her face, and marked the unsteady movement of her fingers on the keys of the piano.

The quadrille concluded, Sir Thomas would

again sought Cecil, who retained her at the instrument; but he was instantly called on to stand up in a waltz, which his hostess took care should not be a short one; but when that finished, his host seized upon him to enquire about some hunters for sale in the neighbourhood, and would not let him go, though he might easily have seen, and probably felt, that in spite of all his politeness he was thoroughly weary of the subject, and longed to be by the piano.

Instead of waltzing, Lord Fitz Edwyn had taken a seat by Mrs. Hatton; but whilst apparently occupied with her he failed not to watch Cecil's every movement. Miss Ford was weary of waltzing; and accidentally took her chair on his other side, so his hostess begged him to sit still in peace. Refreshments were handed round, when the waltzing ceased; and all took some, save the pale American, to whom none were offered. As the butler was passing her with the tray to leave the room, Cecil put out her hand for a glass of

wine. The servant saw the motion; but espying his mistress's impertinence towards the governess, instead of stopping, passed on the quicker. Lotty being engaged at the other end of the room did not observe the circumstance—her brother did and remarked it to Miss Hatton with a sneering laugh, Cecil, faint with pain and fatigue, turned away with a slight flush from the insolent domestick. The insulting laugh reached her quick ear; and sick at heart, and scarcely able to sit up she would have given worlds for the power of quitting the room; but felt unequal to the exertion of walking to the door.

That mocking laugh had hardly died away ere Lord Fitz Elwyn stood beside her with calico and wine. He had seen her distress—her drooping head; and with a glance that would have annihilated Mr. Beckington Ford, if nothing could be annihilated, had taken the tray of refreshments from the servant and brought it himself to Cecil.

“You are not strong, Miss Clare, and ha

over fatigued ; allow me to recommend a cake and wine," he observed with a path—a devotion in his manner that filled Ford and her daughters with envy.

Could this really be Lord Fitz Elwyn, standing beside her playing the waiter, and speaking with such earnest, anxious kindness, though with some slight mingling of hauteur as Cecil had? She ventured one glance at his face; and there read pity. She would have thanked him;—but the words died on her lips unuttered, and her hand shook so much as she attempted to take the wine, that his lordship assisted her in placing the glass on the piano before her; whilst Ford, shocked at the viscount's so degrading himself, called sharply to the servant to take away the tray.

"Miss Ford has been asking me, Fitz Elwyn, if I called my yacht the *Miranda*? and in reply that the name was your choice—and not mine, is now anxious to know what I called your choice," said Sir Thomas Willer-

ton, who, having broken away from the father, was laid hold of by the daughter. "I suspect that there is some fair lady in the case, you blush so prettily, when you name the name," he added to vex the questioner. "What say you to that, Fitz?"

"That I have not the honor of knowing any lady, who bears that appellation," replied his lordship coldly, little pleased at the accusation.

"Perhaps not one who bears the name; but you may know one who admires it particularly. The fair daughter of a noble earl it may be, has been heard to remark on its beauty," continued Sir Thomas Willerton too fully bent on teasing Miss Ford, to heed his friend's increasing annoyance.

"You may have heard many fair ladies praise the name; and it has been a favorite play of mine from my childhood," replied Fitz Elywn in some confusion, a confusion the more remarkable as forming such a contrast to his usual self-possession.

Well, Fitz, I will not press you further now ; as we shall remain some time longer in the neighbourhood, leave it to Miss Ford to extract truth."

"Is it really the name of an earl's daughter?" questioned Miss Ford, lowering her voice a little at only a little.

"Not exactly ; but there is a certain Lady who could throw some light on the subject, no doubt," replied Sir Thomas in a confidential whisper, loud enough however to reach the ears, who had been struggling against faintness, which had so nearly overcome her, and now held the glass to her lips with a steady hand, and an air of resolute self command—some might have thought of pride.

Lord Fitz Elwyn did not again address her ; Mrs. Ford forestalled his offer to put down the glass on a table near.

"I am delighted to hear that your lordship Sir Thomas Willerton intend remaining some time in the neighbourhood," began Mrs. Ford, addressing the viscount, who looked in-

clined to deny the truth of the statement ; but before he could speak his friend had answered for him.

"Not only intend to be some time in the neighbourhood ; but hope also to be much at Oakfield Villa, and see a great deal of the Fords," replied the baronet, approaching his hostess, not from admiration of her personal merits, but because she was near the piano, and he wished to propitiate her for the sake of her cousin, whom he might otherwise find difficult to meet.

"You do me great honor ; we shall all be highly delighted," cried the enraptured Mrs. Ford, including Lord Fitz Elwyn in her address, who, instead of participating in her pleasure, showed vexation at the announcement.

"This is very kind of you, Mrs. Ford. I am an impertinent fellow, I know ; and my enemies say never forget that I am a young baronet with a clear income, and full freedom of choice on all points ; but my friends never hint at such scandal ; and to put your friendly

ings to the test, I invite all the party here
abled to accompany me to Fresh Water
to-morrow—weather permitting—to be on
d the Miranda at eleven. All the ayes
up their hands."

There was a general laugh; and every hand
up, but Cecil's and Lord Fitz Elwyn's.

C'est une affaire finie," exclaimed the lively
net, attempting to win a station near Cecil;
Mrs. Ford had other views.

Are you going to dance any more? If so,
Beckington, arrange the set. I never saw
idle dancers—it was not so in my young
" Beckington took his mother's hint, and
six couple were soon in their places, the
net and his friend, though provoked at the
œuvre, being compelled to dance—the first
the eldest—the last with the second Miss

I see you are quite knocked up, my dear
. Just play this one set of quadrilles;
then you can steal quietly out of the room
at the ladies and gentlemen are making

their bows ; and I will facilitate your retreat," whispered Mrs. Ford to her poor cousin, who bowed her acquiescence.

The set was concluded ; and Cecil had just reached the door, when Sir Thomas sprang forward ; and laying his hand on the lock as if to open it, detained her to listen to his regrets at her departure.

" Do not delay me now ; my throbbing head pleads hard for rest," said Cecil abruptly.

" I will not be so selfish as to keep you then," only promise to join the party to-morrow, let me who will endeavour to gainsay it."

" I cannot have poor Cecil tormented," interposed Mrs. Ford, whose movements had been nearly as quick as the baronet's.

" Good night ;" said Cecil availing herself of Mrs. Ford's interposition to leave the room.

" I count on your presence to-morrow ;—in fact, I go not without you," whispered Sir Thomas following Cecil across the hall.

Her only reply was the waving him back.

" I take this as a token of assent and shall

of to-morrow's pleasure" said the baronet, giving a last adieu and retracing his steps.

After the guests departed, and those at 'selon les règles' began to comment on those who were gone! but as those comments usually exhibited little wit, and less good sense, as far as Cecil was concerned, we shall mention an observation of Mrs. Hatton's, who alone spoke in favor of the absent governess.

"I never saw any one so struck at first sight as Thomas Willerton with Miss Clare. It will be a match I can see; and I am very glad of it, for she is a very pleasant, agreeable young woman."

"Depend upon it you are mistaken, my dear Mrs. Hatton; Sir Thomas is only amusing himself for the moment. A baronet, young, handsome and good looking as he is, would never be a beggar, the daughter of a ruined man. It would have been far better if Cecil had not meddled so with him, doing all she could to attract

his attention. I hate to see young women go forward," exclaimed the vexed Mrs. Ford.

"Time will show who is in the right," replied Mrs. Hatton; "and you really should not accuse Miss Clare of flirting, for, though very animated, her manner was so lady-like and even dignified, as to command the most perfect respect ; whilst, instead of seeking the baronet's attentions, he forced them on her."

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Hatton; you do not know Miss Clare, as I do," remarked Mr. Ford with a deep sigh and mysterious look, as if Cecil's secret wickedness had caused him an inconceivable agony.

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THE
QUIET HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

“She is an angel! and shall be my wife within months,” exclaimed Sir Thomas Willerton, walking some time by his friend’s side in

“Who is an angel?” asked Fitz Elwyn, startled, by this unexpected burst, from a deep reverie.

“Who is an angel? who should be an angel, Miss Clare? You do not think there is anything angelic about the Fords do you?”

"Certainly not; but different people have different ideas of angels," replied the viscount with a quiet sarcasm, which provoked his friend.

"Different ideas truly! I marvel how you could behold such perfection with such stoical coldness; or worse than coldness; for you looked quite harsh and fierce sometimes; but it is all as well as it is, for your being my rival here would neither please me nor Lady Barbara. I repeat it—Miss Clare shall be my wife within six months."

"Indeed!" observed Fitz Elwyn in a tone of irritating incredulity.

"Yes indeed! Why do you doubt it?"

"Only because this is the fifty fifth young lady about whose perfections (all discovered at first, or second sight,) you have bored me, declaring that each should be your wife."

"That is a scandalous libel, Fitz Elwyn," exclaimed the baronet reddening at the charge.

"I never said so of more than three."

three—umph ! we will count them fairly—

Annis—Miss Mitford—Miss—”

Stop, stop Fitz Elwyn ; do let the girls

it is not delicate to bring in their names

way,” interposed the baronet, conscious

infirmity of raving about young ladies

week, and being indifferent about them the

“ All I ever said before was nonsense ;—

it, as I intend to do ;—I entertain

ally different feeling for Miss Clare :

love, respect, and admiration all mingled

er. People may say what they will ;

ere certainly is such a thing as love at

ight.”

Romeo and Juliet to wit ; vide Shakspeare,”

ved the viscount drily.

You may laugh as you please ; but I say

—Miss Clare shall be my wife.”

do you said of Miss Thelwall.”

Psha ! how provoking you are ! you know

girl was an arrant flirt.”

You told me she was perfection.”

"I told you nonsense then ; but Miss Clare is a totally different person."

"Does she approve of, and share your feelings?"

"How can you ask such a question, Fitz? What makes you so stupid to-night? As if I could venture on a declaration at a first meeting to such a girl as Cecil Clare? She receives my attentions as I wished ; and she shall be mine. Laugh as you may at the suddenness of the passion, the happiness of my whole life is in her keeping ; I shall be miserable without her."

Fitz Elwyn neither laughed nor reproved, but walked on towards Key Haven with a quicker step.

The silence was at length broken by Sir Thomas again speaking abruptly on the one subject that now occupied his thoughts.

"I rely on your friendship to assist me in winning her, Fitz Elwyn."

"Pardon me, Willerton. I have neither tact nor inclination for such an office."

You need not speak so sharply ; I only want to keep Mrs. Ford and her daughters a little away, to give me opportunity for my wooing."

A modest request truly !"

I will not say much for its modesty ; but I will do that, and far more to promote your business."

I am not certain that this would promote happiness."

I have no fear of a rejection, if that is what you mean ; my wooing has hitherto sped as successfully as I could desire ; and though Mrs. Ford may in her prosperity have looked for a richer son-in-law, as some assert, though I do not believe so, yet she seems far too high minded to wed for rank or wealth, a bloody hand may content her. In fine, whether you aid me, or not, she shall be."

Bakalum ! as the Turks say," observed the friend.

Yes ; we shall see ! You are too honorable to endeavour to supplant me."

"Fear not that," replied Fitz Elwyn haughtily.

"If you do not keep that poor cousin of yours more in the back ground, she will become Lady Willerton; and you lose your governess," remarked Mr. Ford, sinking into an easy chair in his wife's dressing room.

"What can I do? This is the only day that she has seen strangers; and I could neither anticipate meeting the baronet, nor his taking such a foolish fancy to her, sickly as she looks."

"You may do what you please; I only warn you to do something. I will not give more than twenty pounds a year for a governess, that I can tell you; so if you cannot get one for that, you, or the elder girls must teach the younger ones; for there is no money to pay for their schooling. I want to buy Hilson's hunter, and some of his claret; and have no spare cash to waste on teaching girls to squall and strum on the piano. What good does it do? Does it get them husbands? Hundreds

been spent on Ann and Susan ; and yet
are still Fords. They had better marry
or their fortunes may not be forthcoming.
ington has managed very well for himself
the little money left by his grandmother ;
the girls must take example from him. I
no office now remember ; and am not
to abridge my comforts to buy them
nds. You must keep the girl more under ;
that independent air no one can take
a governess."

wish you would try and keep her under,
ar, for I cannot."

Excuse me, my love ; I never meddle with
esses : wife and children are quite enough
to manage.—I never before knew you
keeping a dependant under."

ecil is not a dependant ; she has an al-
e of a hundred a year ; and were I to
the cord but the quarter of an inch
she would rebel and be off, which would
ty, for she gets the children on amazingly.

She is so much prettier and prouder than expected, that I doubt the wisdom of having invited her ; but you advised, nay, almost insisted on it."

"That is right, my dear ; always lay blame on my advice, instead of your own inefficient acting. As I said before, you must keep the girl under."

"I can do no more than I have already done ; she is as proud as—"

"Lucifer ! I know that, my dear ; but as a clever person might accomplish it, though she has much of her father's indomitable spirit. You must control her through that father ; show her all the evil that has been, or may be done by him—convince her that there will not be enough to pay his creditors—rouse her pride about being dependent on the Ashtons, who must be fools to make her such an allowance—but first and foremost prevent her going to Fresh Water Bay to-morrow, for the baronet is so deeply smitten that, by playing her card

ll, she might hamper him with an engagement before another day. And now having given you warning and advice, I leave you to rely upon them," added Mr. Ford, rising with some effort from his easy chair, and passing on to an inner room. His wife pondered on his words; and then proceeded to act on her deductions.

Cecil's strength was barely sufficient to enable her to reach her garret, where, sinking on the bed, she lay for some time without moving in a state bordering on insensibility. The exertions made by the servants in retiring to their apartments, which were adjoining hers, roused her to fresh exertions; and faint and dizzy from pain and exhaustion she hastened to lay her aching head on the pillow, though hopeless of sleep, at least for hours to come. But she would be in silence and darkness; with no unkind and prying eyes to mark her agony, and no unkind and bitter tongue to comment on her looks and words. Poor Cecil! her quiet

was to be again disturbed—silence and darkness were to bring her little peace.

Her light had not been extinguished many minutes, before there came a tap at her door, and ere she could say ‘come in’ Mrs. F. had entered the room, and, placing her candle on the table so that the light fell full on her cousin’s face, seated herself in a chair by the bed.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed Cecil, starting up in alarm at this unexpected and unwelcome visit.

“Nothing; so do not put yourself in a fright without a cause. I only thought that what I have to say might be better said to-night, than hoping to find you still up.”

“If it is nothing very material, I would rather you deferred the communication to-morrow, as the throbbing of my temples will make me dull of comprehension; and I am really in need of rest,” said Cecil, vexed at being thus broken in on when she had hoped that her trials of the day were over.

"I think it better to speak to you to-night," replied Mrs. Ford in that cold and haughty tone from which Cecil knew there was no appeal.

"It must be as you please then madam ; and I can only beg you to be brief."

"I am no such great talker that you need read a long discourse ; and it is my commiseration for your headache that brings me here at this hour. I came to say that you had better breakfast in bed to-morrow ; and not get up till twelve or one o'clock."

"I shall be very thankful for the indulgence," answered Cecil, wondering for the instant at such unusual consideration.

"I am glad to see you willing for once to take my advice, my dear Cecil ; and hope to find you equally reasonable on other points," remarked Mrs. Ford more kindly, a little mollified by this ready acquiescence. "Your conduct towards Sir Thomas Willerton, I am sorry to say, attracted general observation, and caused

many comments ; so many indeed that, setting aside any consideration for the children's lessons, you could not with any regard to delicacy and propriety form one of the party to-morrow ; your headache will furnish a good and sufficient excuse for your absence."

" Quite sufficient, without referring to your remarks on my conduct, which I value as they deserve. I never intended to join the party to-morrow ; and shall spend part of the day in writing to Mrs. Ashton ; and requesting her to arrange for my immediate return."

" I cannot hear of that, my dear ; as your nearest relative, this is your proper home," replied Mrs. Ford, after a moment's pause of doubt, rising to leave the room and thus prevent further discussion.

" Pardon me ; but I am resolute as to departing," said Cecil firmly.

" And what reason will you assign for this ?" demanded Mrs. Ford, colouring with anger and with difficulty restraining its expression.

The true one."

Indeed! Will you say that you are resolved to throw yourself into the arms of a wild baronet, who is only making game of me, and that I am striving to prevent it?"

No, Mrs. Ford; that, as you well know, is not the truth. I shall say that finding myself an unwelcome guest at Oakfield I shall be delighted to return to my kind home at Ashton Grove."

What fancy is this, my dear, that you have put in your head? Is this your gratitude for my kindness?"

Kindness, Mrs. Ford! I have seen none; it is time that we should understand each other," replied Cecil, sitting upright in the bed, his exertion nerving her to the painful explanation though her head was still aching violently; her cheek nearly as white as the frill that shadowed it. "You invited me hither as a guest and relative, professing friendship; I have met with nothing save slight and

insult. Instead of a guest you would make me a dependant, and convert your dearly loved cousin into a drudge with all the penalties of servitude, and none of its alleviations. I have taught your children to acquit myself of little I owe you for poor lodging and scanty food; but I neither am, nor will be your governess, as you have described me to others. After this explanation, the sooner we part the more agreeable I conclude it will be to all. I shall write to-morrow to prepare the Ashtons for my return; and if you will be kind enough to procure me a fitting attendant for the journey, it will free you from my presence on the succeeding day."

For some moments Mrs. Ford was silent from surprise and rage at her poor cousin's audacity. That Cecil was no irresolute simpleton she had long since discovered; but his firmness and decision were beyond her expectation, and very contrary to her wishes. Such rank and open rebellion must be checked.

re; and her anger overcame all scruples as the mode of subduing it.

"You have favored me with one explanation as to Clare, and I will return it with another; should my communication prove the most painful you will have none but yourself to blame. You are a beggar—an absolute beggar living upon alms! Your father's property cannot answer the claims of his creditors; and the allowance you receive from the Ashtons is owing from them by their pity. You are sorry at my honest statement, and would tell me that my words are false—They are true; had the Ashtons not hurried you away from Liverpool you would have learnt their truth and the general reprobation of your father's ostentatious pride, and gambling speculations, and your mother's weakness and love of luxury." "Say what you will of me, madam; but speak not one word against my beloved and respected parents. Show some regard for the feelings of an orphan," exclaimed the indignant Cecil.



"It is needful that you should know the truth; and I tell no more," replied Mrs. Ford, a little awed by her remonstrance; but still resolute in pursuing her ungenerous purpose. "Since you doubt my word, peruse that letter—an answer to one from Mr. Ford, enquiring into your condition and prospects. You will there find that your father has brought ruin on many who have cause to execrate his memory."

The letter was from an angry creditor, written in an angry spirit; and Cecil clasped her hands in agony as she read the closing imprecations on her parents. There was no date; and if there had been, she was in no state of mind to mark its bearing on the subject: the bitter comments on her own pride and ambition even were scarcely noted—she only felt—she only comprehended that her father was charged with dishonesty, and her mother made a partner in his crime either from weakness, or a love of show. It had u

act been written within a week after Mr. Clare's sudden decease, during the most exaggerated rumours of his debts and speculations, but his child was much too agitated to consider that such might be the case.

"You are shocked, Cecil, as well you may be," observed Mrs. Ford more kindly, half alarmed at the effects of her communication. "I should not have shown you this letter, but for your evident doubts of my veracity; and the necessity for your understanding your real situation, that you may justly appreciate my conduct, and the wisdom of my advice. To leave you a dependant on the bounty and pity of strangers was not to be thought of; and we considered it the kindest plan to invite you either as a guest; and gradually lead you to a clear comprehension of the truth, at the same time providing you with a pleasing and useful occupation, that should preclude any painful feeling of dependance. This friendly purpose your own pride and impatience have in some

manner thwarted, compelling me to a more abrupt and open revelation of the truth than I had intended; but the blame of this must rest on yourself."

Mrs. Ford paused for a reply; but Cecil was silent, only pressing her hand to her head as if she would still its aching; or that she might more clearly comprehend what had been said to her; and her cousin continued assuming a still more friendly tone as she proceeded. "You see, my dear Cecil, the impossibility of remaining a pensioner of the Ashtons, who, having a large family of their own, cannot in justice continue to allow you a hundred a year, though their pity might prompt the wish.

"I feel that," replied Cecil in a tone which must have melted any one but Mrs. Ford, and her equally selfish husband.

"I was sure that when once informed of the truth, your good sense would lead you to agree with me, my dear. And now we will end this painful discussion. You have too independent

spirit to eat the bread of idleness ;—here you have a comfortable home ;—the girls, who are much attached to you, will improve rapidly under your tuition ; and you are certain of receiving every kindness from me and mine. So to-night, love ; forget all that has passed—sleep soundly ; and I will send up your breakfast in the morning.”

Thinking Mrs. Ford would have kissed her cousin ; but Cecil drew back from the salute, her indignation supplying the place that had before been checked, from the emotion caused by the perusal of that distressing

“No, madam, I will not eat the bread of idleness ; but neither will I remain beneath the protection of one, who could so outrage an orphan’s honour for her lost parents. The Ashtons will procure me the situation of governess in another family.”

Beware, Cecil, how you bring suspicion on your own fair fame ; and the fame of your



mother," exclaimed Mrs. Ford relapsing into her former anger. "The world is already busy with its hundred tongues enquiring why Mrs. Ashton, who is no relation, should have been summoned to the death-bed of Mrs. Clare, and her daughter committed to his charge; while the gossips whisper, that Cecil Clare—the orphan—the beggar—the child of a dishonored father—has sufficient cunning to redeem her fallen fortunes by a union with the heir of Ashton Grove. As your nearest relative, it is alike my duty and my inclination to prevent any scandal resting on your mother."

"I will not thank you for this care, madam, since it is neither needed nor felt. My mother's fame is above the breath of malice; and there can be nothing strange in confiding her unprotected daughter to the guardianship of her father's ward, the companion of her childhood. As for seeking a union with the heir of Ashton Grove, that is a charge beneath consideration; no one but yourself would entertain such

And now, if you please, let this discussion end as you proposed; for I am unable to endure a prolonged conversation." Show not so much pride and obstinacy, which, I am sorry to say, you seem inclined to do in more than one instance. The universal voice proclaims that Ashton Grove is waiting abode for you; accept therefore the offer which once again I offer you."

"No, no: I cannot stay here," exclaimed she with a wildness, that alarmed her cousin. Compose yourself, my dear; at least make a decision—take no step till after to-morrow; you are not in a state to judge wisely now. Should your wishes remain the same a day or two hence I will do my utmost to procure you a more comfortable situation."

"So let it rest then," said Cecil, ready to consent to almost any thing that would free her from the presence of her unfeeling relative.

" Good night then once more, dear Cecily, you only require time and reflection to judge and act correctly," observed Mrs. Ford, leaving the room without waiting for a reply, and without again offering a kiss to her high spirited governess.

" She will be hard to manage and never submit to my commands I fear. Perhaps it would be better to yield the point; and let her go once; but I doubt if Sir Thomas Willerton would come save for the hope of seeing her, so she must remain as a lure for some days at least; and yet be kept out of his way, which last she would have me believe is her own wish. I am not to be so easily deceived; but I could rule ten others better than this beggar whose pride is as great as before her fall, speaking and looking as though she were more than my equal," said Mrs. Ford to her husband, rejoining him after her interview with Cecily, her eyes flashing with anger as she spoke.

" You must manage all that as you best can

my dear; only don't tease me with your cousin's intrusions; for I am very sleepy. By the bye; I wish you would speak to the cook about that pie we had to-day. I like things more highly seasoned. She does not take as much pains as she did at first; and that is the way with them all. I wish we had Tyrrell's cook; she is a capital hand!"

"And capital wages, too, Mr. Ford. Sixty guineas a year!—and yet you cannot afford a governess for your daughters."

"What is the use of the girls' squalling and drumming? Men think much more of a good dinner, depend upon it; so mind you speak to the cook," replied Mr. Ford, settling himself for sleep as he concluded.

Cecil listened with haggard features and glaring eye till she could no longer hear the fall of Mrs. Ford's slippered foot on the creaking staircase; then certain that she was once more alone, she sank back on the pillow, looking more like a marble statue than a living, feeling

woman. Her head ached as before—no relief relieved her bitter agony; and that hateful letter with her cousin's triumphant look ever before her eyes, and ever uppermost in her bewildered mind. Was it true what her cousin had written? Was it true what her father had said? Was her father branded with dishonour? Had he brought ruin on many, by fraudulent and unholy gambling? Did the world really whisper scandal of her mother's account of her sojourn at Ashton Grove? And must she leave the only friends to whom she could look for shelter? She tried to weigh each circumstance fairly, though her throbbing temples and stricken heart made this no easy task. It was beyond her power—the shock had been too great for thought—her head was bewildered—she felt intensely, but she could not argue clearly:—a heavy weight seemed pressing on her chest—she breathed with difficulty, whilst gibbering forms flitted before her face. She rose, and throwing on her dress

sat at the window with her forehead
on the sill. The stars shone bright in
tranquil sky; and the murmur of the tide
up from the dark blue sea; but that mur-
soothed her not as it had done on the first
of her arrival; its hoarse monotonous
per chafed her troubled spirit; and she put
hands to her ears to shut out the sound;—
regularity seemed a reproach to her restless-

How differently do we judge of sounds
sights according to our own varying
gs!

After a while she grew more composed—more
ple of thought and reflection; and the
e gradually opened on her view. There
t be—there probably was some truth in
Mrs. Ford had said; but there was doubt-
also considerable exaggeration, if not in-
ion to gratify that lady's anger, and turn
d to her purpose. Those who had suffered
her father's losses might in their vexation
bitter things against the unintentional

cause of that suffering, which her hasty departure from Liverpool had saved her the pain of hearing; but she would not believe without further proof that the offered kindness of the Ashtons, and her acceptance of it, would make herself or her mother the subject of malicious remarks; and her own conscience acquitted her of any attempt to win the affections of the heiress. Still to remain there as a dependant was not to be thought of; she had talents—accomplishments—and she would exert them to gain a livelihood; but not at Oakfield Villa;—she would leave that as soon as she could; and it was possible not to return to Ashton Grove. But how to avoid one of these alternatives, at least for a time, was beyond her power to devise; so she put off the consideration till the morrow, having engaged to take no step in furtherance of her plans, till she had again spoken to Mrs. Ford. She was ill—very ill, and might not live long; and she should leave none to mourn her but the Ashtons; and they would soon forget her.

She was not aware of the time she had sat at the window with her head bowed, and her eyes closed but not in sleep; and when she looked up the stars had left the sky; and the morning light was waxing fuller and fuller every moment, for it was nearly midsummer, and the nights were short. She looked to the east where the golden sun was rising rapidly above the horizon. Its beauty pained her. There was no joyous dawn for her—her sun had set for ever, and the darkness of night was coming on. She looked towards Alum Bay; she gazed on the cliffs up which she had climbed on the preceding day—on the spot from whence she had watched the approach of the *Miranda*—where she had stood when introduced to Lord Fitzwlyn and Sir Thomas Willerton;—a sun-beam shot across it as she gazed, throwing it into picturesque relief;—tear after tear rolled unheeded down her pallid cheeks;—one fell on the hand that rested in her lap. She started—looked down at the glistening tear,

then up again at that bright point ; but the sun-beam was gone, and it was no brighter than the cliffs around ;—she covered her face with her hands, and her choking sobs bespoke her agony. Still that weeping was a relief—it cooled her burning brow—it relieved her maddening brain ; and gradually those sobs grew fainter and fainter ; and she began to be conscious of the chiliness of the morning air.

Without another glance towards Alum Bay she drew the window curtain close, sighing as she did so ; then seeking her bed and turning away from the light, endeavoured to obtain the repose of which she stood so much in need. It was some time before it came ; but when it did it was heavy, so heavy that she heard none of the banging of doors, which had before disturbed her morning's slumbers ; and was not even aware of Lotty's coming into her room to bring her breakfast.

The whole of the party were to have assembled at Key Haven by half past ten ; but long

fore that time Sir Thomas Willerton and Lord Fitz Elywn were at the gate, leading to Oakfield Villa; and Lotty, who was playing in the garden, immediately ran towards them.

"How is Miss Clare?" asked the baronet eagerly.

"Dear Cecil is fast asleep; I have been into her room twice, and yet she did not wake; and she is looking so white! just like the sheet and breathing so heavily!"

"The fatigue of yesterday was too much for her; she must have advice," observed Sir Thomas anxiously, whilst the viscount stooped to pick a flower.

"Mamma says her sleeping so soundly is a good thing; and that she will get up quite well; and I will be sure and tell her how kindly you asked after her," said Lotty looking cheerful.

"Then she could not have gone, had we been going," observed the baronet colouring slightly.

"No; she told mamma last night that she should not go; but all the others will be ready in a minute, except me; and I shall stay to nurse dear Cecil."

"You are a good, kind little creature," cried Sir Thomas, looking very much as if he would have caught her up in his arms and hugged her, if she had not been quite so fat. "You will lose nothing by your kindness, since the party must be deferred—positively deferred—must it not Fitz Elwyn?"

"Undoubtedly;" replied the viscount with a wreathing of the lips, that was a smile—yet not a smile. If it meant to mock his friend, it appeared still more to mock himself.

"Good morning, my lord. Good morning, Sir Thomas. You are early; but we shall be ready for you in no time. It is very kind of you to come and fetch us," began Mrs. Forster, advancing to meet the gentlemen, fearful that Lotty might say what she would wish unsaid.

"I am very sorry; but I am come to an

ce that the party must be put off," replied Thomas Willerton "the wind is veering about the sky growing wilder every instant ;—and the best seamen predict a day the very reverse of what one would desire for a water excursion." Boatmen are always timid ; and our glass is so high, that I should feel no fear in sailing," said Mrs. Ford, who, having seen Cecil's absence, was resolved if possible not to be balked of the party, which she anticipated would give her daughters a chance of seeing titles.

It is quite out of the question I assure you, Mrs. Ford. Watson is not at all timid ; and it will be impossible to take ladies on to-day," replied Sir Thomas resolutely, his illness settling the point, which had been doubtful ; and which was to have been referred to her.

In vain did Mrs. Ford and her daughters declare that they were no cowards and should not fear to venture, the baronet stood firm.



couching his refusal to take them in such flattering terms as could not offend; and Fitz Elwyn proving as immoveable, the party was at length given up; Sir Thomas laughingly proposing that as a compensation, he should stay with them on land, instead of their going with him on the water, a proposition joyfully accepted to; and in which the viscount was considered to be included, though he had taken no active part in the question.

Light showers with a brisk wind proving the truth of Watson's predictions, the Fords submitted to the disappointment with a better grace; and did their best to amuse their guests; but the baronet could not help an occasional yawn, as he made a show of listening to Susan's unmeaning prattle, but ever keeping a sharp look out towards the door, though no Cecil made her appearance; while Fitz Elwyn, heartily weary of Miss Ford's silliness, challenged Mr. Hatton to a game of chess.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT is the matter?" enquired Emma Ashton in alarm, as Robert burst into the room where she was sitting at work, throwing back the door behind him with a violence that shook the house.

"Has any thing happened to Edward?" questioned his mother, starting up, and thereby causing herself considerable pain, having lately sprained her ankle and in consequence been confined to the house.

"No ;" answered Robert, flinging himself into a chair, and fanning himself violently with his hat.

"Then Charles and Sarah have met with some accident."

"No, no, my dear mother ; your children are all as well as though they were annuitants, and those never die," replied Robert impatiently.

"Then what is the matter, for you are very odd, there is no making any thing out of

"I am in a rage, my dear mother, that is a grand, heroical, towering rage."

"What Purcell's pigs have been in the turnip field again, I suppose ;—that comes of being confined to the house."

"Hang Purcell, and his pigs, and the turnips too. Do you suppose that I should be in a rage if all the turnip fields in the world were eaten up, or trodden down?" exclaimed Robert in high irritation.

"For shame, Robert, to speak so rashly. What would the poor sheep do in the winter

"there were no turnips?" remarked Mrs. Ashton reprovingly, whilst her husband looked from his book, wondering at such a superabundance of energy; and then resumed his reading, never considering that to his indolence might be attributed many of his children's faults.

If Mrs. Ashton was fidgety and fussy from over supply of activity, Mr. Ashton was deficient in his social and paternal duties from natural indolence, and an increasing dread of exertion. He never said an unkind word to his wife; but he never reproved his children for disrespect to their mother, to whom however they were all really much attached.

"What has made you so angry then? Has anything happened?"

"No, no; Flinter, and Purcell's pigs seem to be *bêtes noires*. I am in a rage about Cecil's marriage. Those wretches of cousins have degraded her into a governess to their stupid, ignorant, troublesome children, telling every

one that her father was a great rogue ; and she a beggar ; and then boasting of their charity and kindness in affording her a garret to sleep in—the corner of a dull school-room to sit in—with bread and milk for breakfast, and potatoes and hashed mutton for dinner.”

“ Impossible ! Who told you this ? Is it really true ?—Poor Cecil !—I do not wonder at your being in such a rage !”—cried all his hearers, their different remarks mingling strangely together.

“ It is true ; for I had it from Skinner, who is just come from the neighbourhood ; and met the Fords at dinner. It was as much as I could help quarrelling with the fellow, when he added with a sneering laugh, that it would do her good—bring down her pride.”

“ I never liked Mr. Skinner ; and shall detest him now,” cried the warm hearted Emma. “ I was afraid dear Cecil was not happy from her letters ; but she never hinted a word of this.”

"Why did not she come back the moment she found herself uncomfortable?" said Mrs. Ashton. "She knows that we should all be delighted to have her here again."

"Cecil Clare is one who would rather bear conquer than complain; and if that wretch a woman put it into her head that she will merit nothing from her father, ten to one that she has some fancy that it would be mean and indelicate to return to us, and that she is obliged on to work for her living; I never knew more independant spirit."

"Poor child, I hope she has no fancies of that sort; she should know us better; and understand how much we all love her. But what is to be done? I would go to her immediately, but Mr. Larkins forbids my moving; I can write at any rate, and entreat her to come back," said Mrs. Ashton.

"Would it not be better, sir, if you went down to Milford having been appointed her guardian by Mrs. Clare?—She might resist a

letter," observed Robert addressing his father, whose book had fallen from his hand, at his son's announcement.

"I was just thinking of that Robert," replied Mr. Ashton.

"Then shall I order the carriage at once, sir? And I can go too and save you the trouble of paying the postboys and people. We can stop at Dorchester coming back, and see Blackwall on the business he wrote about a fortnight since. You should not put off this journey, for Skinner tells me that Cecil is looking dreadfully ill."

"I have no wish to put it off and shall be ready in half an hour. There has never been any delay where Cecil's welfare was concerned," replied Mr. Ashton, considering his son's words as intended to convey a reproach for his usual dilatoriness.

"No, sir, there never has. I wish you showed as much energy in your own concerns," observed Robert frankly, yet respectfully.

Mr. Blackwall has been waiting an answer some days; and his interest may procure a commission for Charles."

"You are so quick yourself, Robert, that you think every one else is slow. Order the marriage; we can go one or two stages before it."

"I will scrawl a few lines to Cecil, and scold her for not writing to say that she was miserable," cried Emma.

"And tell her from me, that I will not hear of her staying away any longer," added Mrs. Ashton.

"I am afraid she has had a great deal to endure from the Fords, and is much worse than when she went; so we must pet her there," observed Robert as he quitted the room.

It was about two o'clock of the day after the excursion to Alum Bay, that the Ashtons arrived at Oakfield Villa; and heard in answer to their enquiry if Miss Clare was at home, that the servant would go and see.

Encountering his mistress in the hall the man repeated Mr. Ashton's message, and received directions to show the visitors into the drawing room, and say that Miss Clare would join them immediately.

No guests could at that moment have been more unwelcome to Mrs. Ford, who had just been playing the bland to the lately risen Cecil ;—enquiring after her headache—offering her delicacies to tempt her appetite—and doing her utmost, without absolutely referring to the subject, to induce her to remain as her governess. This unexpected visit, though she never guessed its determined purpose, threatened ill for her plan ; but if she could prevent the Ashtons from seeing her cousin, save in her presence, all might go right ; and hence her order for their being ushered into the drawing-room, whither she hastened, overpowering them with the cordiality of her reception.

The weather having cleared a little her title beaux and most of the rest of the party had

off to walk till dinner, Mrs. Hatton alone
g left in the drawing-room, whose penetra-
never alarmed her friends. To prevent
l's having any private conversation with
Ashtons, and to get rid of them before
return of the walkers, so that the baronet
not increase his penchant by a second
view, was Mrs. Ford's determination; but
Ford, with all her diplomatic skill, and
ed politeness, was not omnipotent; rain
ld come, when she did not desire it—
lovers seek their lady loves despite her
ming.

a vain did she endeavour to make herself
agreeable to Mr. Ashton and his son.
former said little, but looked with evident
ety at Cecil's pallid cheeks, and heavy
; whilst the latter so completely mystified
hostess with his eccentric manner—now
nt—now complimentary, that, like his mo-
r, she could make nothing of him. But
e were minor evils; the whole day was to

be "one link of contraries." She had not acted the part of the fascinating hostess for an hour, scarcely letting Cecil put in a word when a heavy rain pattered against the glass and the whole walking party were seen running towards the house for shelter.

Mrs. Ford started up to prevent their entering the drawing-room ; but before she could reach the door it was thrown open by Sir Thomas Willerton, who, having caught a glimpse of Cecil through the window, advanced to greet her with an *empressement*, that left her high regard no matter of debate.

"You cannot think how anxiously I have been hoping to see you," he began, taking her hand heedless or unconscious of the presence of others. "I ceased to regret the change of weather, when I found that you could not join the party. But is your headache really better as Lotty assured me?"

"Yes, much better; and I have to thank you for your obliging enquiries," answered

il with some little confusion, feeling that e than one pair of eyes was on her, for gh she could not fail to be touched by his dly interest, she shrank from attracting rvation. Others had by this time entered room, laughing at the sprinkling and breath-with the run. Mrs. Ford felt herself com-d to introduce her son to the Ashtons; then she did the like with her daughters guests, in the hope of separating Sir nas from her cousin's side; but introduce idget as she would, there he still was, and d remain, every look, every word proclaim-is admiration, though Cecil did all she to check this open show of regard, en-suring in vain to talk with Mr. Ashton, as she might have known, from her long rn in his house, had no talent for keeping conversation.

Good morning ! I hope you are better ;” ll that Fitz Elwyn addressed to Cecil amid bustle of the general introduction ; and

"thank you—much better," was her sole remark, but there was a something in the tone of question and answer, brief as they were, which riveted the attention of Robert Ashton for the moment, the next he was compelled to listen. Mr. Beckington Ford's studied politeness, the young gentleman having resolved to make himself especially agreeable in the hope of obtaining an introduction to his friend Lord Elwyn and his friend when introduced had been cold and formal in the extreme, yet he readily conversed with the ignorant, fawning Beckington Ford. He had his reward. In spite of his mother's frown, which was outweighed by the prospect of grouse shooting, Mr. Beckington Ford invited the Ashtons to stay during the season, an invitation which was promptly accepted.

ert for himself and father. The entrance of Mr. Hatton and his host caused a fresh up-
g and introduction; but still through all, Thomas Willerton retained his station by
till the ladies retired to dress; nor could Ford's manœuvres prevent his obtaining
t beside her at the dinner table, a circum-
e to which she was only half reconciled,
aving secured Fitz Elwyn as a neighbour
er eldest daughter, since even her vche-
wishes could not blind her to the fact
his lordship took no great delight in her
ty, and paid considerable attention to the
ersation of his friend and Cecil.

"My father wishes to speak with you alone
ere shall we find you?" whispered Robert
Miss Clare, as she was following the other
s out of the dining room.

"In the room at the end of the passage,
ng from the hall," replied Cecil in the
low voice.

"And when?"

"As soon as you please."

It was with mingled feelings of fear, and hope, and joy, and sorrow, that Cecil sat in that dull, dark school-room, waiting for the Ashtons. What did they wish to say to her in private? and what should she say to them in return? It would have been less painful and embarrassing to have explained her intention of seeking another home by letter, than *viva voce*; but now that they had come all must be stated.

Had she positively decided on not returning to Ashton Grove? This might depend on the truth or falsehood of her cousin's statement. She was still undecided how to act when the Ashtons joined her.

"Is this the school-room?" demanded Robert, glancing round the cheerless apartment with a flashing eye.

"Yes. How did you know it?"

"I guess and know every thing, Miss Clare;—so take care!" he replied with a penetrating

look, which caused her to colour slightly. "I wish I had the schooling of Mrs. Ford here for a week;—nay I would enact the tutor to that selfish *gourmand* her husband; and that empty, self sufficient coxcomb her son; and you should be under tutor; yet no, you would be too merciful."

"What can induce you to desire such an office! For my part, I must decline being tutor to any of the three, having no taste for martyrdom," replied Cecil smiling at his odd fancy.

"Then why do you undertake the drudgery of teaching their stupid, impertinent girls?" he demanded bluntly.

"Lotty is a dear, warm-hearted, good-tempered child," said Cecil avoiding a direct reply to his question.

"A rose unique, grafted by mistake on a bramble," he observed contemptuously. "But you have not answered my question."

"You are too abrupt, Robert," said Mr.

Ashton, taking Cecil's hand as he sat beside her, and speaking with the earnest affection of a parent. "You were confided to my care by your dying mother—you had a home at Ashton Grove—I hoped a happy one—why then have you become your cousin's governess?"

"I am not Mrs. Ford's governess; and I have expressly told her that I will never become one. No home could be happier than Ashton Grove, and I shall ever be most grateful for the kindness of all its inmates—and yet—"

"And yet what?" questioned Robert impatiently, finding that she hesitated.

"And yet—there are circumstances which may—nay I fear must compel me to seek some other shelter."

"No such thing! no circumstances require that; and we cannot do without you. Here is a letter to this effect from Emma, with a message to the same purport from your mother; and positively you return with

tomorrow. We only came to escort you back to Ashton Grove, and should not dare to show our faces there without you."

"Did you really come all this way only to see me back?" asked the grateful, wondering Cecil, glancing from Robert to his father.

"Yes, indeed, Cecil; and at an hour's notice. Robert brought such a sad account of your health having suffered from Mrs. Ford's unkindly treatment," replied Mr. Ashton. "You are certainly looking very ill; and I hope no obstacle exists to your returning with us to-morrow; or, at the latest, the succeeding day."

"I am grateful—most grateful for all this goodness," said Cecil with a faltering voice, pressing Mr. Ashton's hand to her lips; "but when you have heard what I have to say, you will not urge my return so strongly."

"I understand. You cannot possibly go till you have seen Fresh Water Bay, and the New Forest, and all the other lions of the neighbour-

hood, exhibited by that inimitable lioniser Sir Thomas Willerton, and his stately friend the Viscount Fitz Elwyn. You must sail in the *Miranda*—you must recline in the shade of the coverts of the Forest—you must listen to the baronet's eloquent discourse. It would be cruel to tear you away from all these, and take you back to our dull and stupid Ashton Grove," exclaimed Robert sarcastically.

"You do not understand me," replied Cecily proudly, though conscious that she coloured crimson. "It is not my intention to sail in the *Miranda*, or wander in the Forest, though Sir Thomas Willerton, pitying my situation, would generously do all in his power to alleviate its painfulness; my doubts as to the propriety of returning to Ashton Grove rest on far different grounds, as you should have known. Can I—ought I to eat the bread of idleness, and be dependent on the bounty of strangers, when my own talents might win me a livelihood?"

Strangers?" repeated father and son reproachfully.

No—not strangers ;—kind, most kind
de; I only meant not relatives," replied
quickly.

This is a new fancy! that woman, whom
honor by calling cousin, has been telling
lies," observed Robert abruptly.

I would fain believe that she has."

I am certain that she has."

Will you answer me truly without any
dissimulation from the fear of paining me?" said
looking anxiously towards Mr. Ashton.

Do not doubt me. Ask what you will,"
replied, but not without some slight embar-
rassment, from the remembrance of his early
life for her mother. "What would you
know?"

I would know if I am really a beggar? if
I have cause to blush for my parents?" said

Clare, summoning all her courage to
face a painful truth, if needs must be, repeating

with astonishing correctness, considering circumstances under which she had perused the contents of the letter from her father's creditor.

"And that woman could show such a letter to you!" exclaimed Robert in bitter wrath, his father could speak. "She ought to be kept in a lobster pot, half in, half out of the sea all the rest of her life."

"Is it true?" asked Cecil, looking searchingly into Mr. Ashton's face, not tempted to smile by Robert's ludicrous doom.

"It is false as herself," cried Mr. Ashton with unwonted energy, shocked at the cruelty of showing such a letter to an unprotected orphan. "Your mother, as you must know, neither sought nor valued pomp; your father was deceived by professed friends—defrauded by dishonest agents, and unfortunate in his bold and daring speculations; but no imputation of dishonor rests on his name; and by a letter I received a week ago I learn that not only

my demand be paid in full; but that there be a surplus for your use, though properly a small one. Mr. Kelson, though one of the least, has always been one of the most honest of the creditors, owing to personal integrity; and I have no doubt that his letter was written immediately after your father's death, when a thousand extravagant rumours were afloat."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Cecil, tears of joy starting into her speaking eyes.

"But suppose, Cecil, that there had been no surplus—would you have been too proud to receive a kindness from your mother's early friend—your grandfather's ward?" asked Mr. Kelson reproachfully. "I had hoped that you looked upon me as a second parent. This was unkind."

"Forgive me;" cried Cecil, overcome by his passionate reproach, and bursting into tears. "I do not deserve this kindness."

"Not a whit," observed Robert in a tone

that belied his words. "So this is the terrible bugbear that has turned you into a drudge, and nearly made you renounce father, mother, brothers, and sisters, for you have all these relations at Ashton Grove. You deserve——"

"To be put into the lobster pot with Mrs. Ford," said Cecil, smiling through her tears, as she closed his sentence.

"Exactly; and let me be the fisherman to pull you out," answered Robert gaily. "So now it is all settled; Mrs. Ford must get another governess, and you depart with us to-morrow."

Mrs. Ford's report of the ill-natured comments on her residence at Ashton Grove were most probably as false as her other statements, or were too utterly unfounded to be acted on, so Cecil gave herself no further trouble about them; but answered without hesitation.

"Yes, if you will forgive me, and take me back."

"Will you promise to be very good, and do

exactly as I bid you in all things?" demanded Robert holding up his finger in playful menace.

"I will try to be good; and do all that Mr. Ashton bids me," answered Cecil, turning away from the keen gaze of her questioner.

"A very proper reply; Robert is far too wild a guide for a young maiden;" observed Mr. Ashton with an affectionate smile.

"Umph! I may have a deeper knowledge of the heart of a young maiden, and a far saner judgment thereof than some imagine," replied Robert a little piqued; adding with a sudden change of manner. "Well, if you will not let me rule you, I must go and torment Mrs. Ford by telling her of the intended elopement of her accomplished and submissive governess. I have half a mind to propose taking your place to console her."

"Stop, Robert. Don't be rude to Mrs. Ford; remember she is a woman, and your hostess," interposed quiet Mr. Ashton.

"Miss Clare was also her guest, Sir. Never fear; I will be most exceedingly polite in my tormenting," replied his son whisking out of the room as he spoke, lest his father should speak more peremptorily.

Mrs. Ford was alone when he entered the drawing-room, and he advanced towards her with great glee, anticipating the annoyance which his communication would cause her.

"Am I to condole with, or congratulate you on the prospect of losing one of your fair relatives?" he began, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"To what do you allude?" enquired the lady, uncertain of his meaning.

"Nay, Mrs. Ford, do not pretend ignorance of my allusion; it would be a libel on your penetration to speak more plainly; there are signs and symptoms, looks and words in which you could not have been mistaken."

"It is a delicate subject to touch on," replied Mrs. Ford after a little hesitation; but as

her—an anxious affectionate mother—I cannot have failed to perceive Lord Fitz Elwyn's intentions to my eldest daughter."

Indeed! Well there your penetration beats me; for I had not an idea of the sort. I must congratulate the viscount immediately, as he is my nearest neighbour."

I must beg that you will do no such thing," cried the lady in alarm. "Such delicate matters should never even be hinted at till all preliminaries have been settled, and the parties formally engaged, which is not exactly the case at present."

Depend on my discretion, Mrs. Ford. But as another enlèvement of which I spoke; I must guess again."

It would be useless; you really must tell me for I have not an idea."

Is it possible that with your penetration you have not anticipated the loss of Miss Clare?"

"Oh! that is all nonsense," replied the lady with a flush of vexation. Sir Thomas Willerton

was only introduced to her yesterday, and he has no serious views I can assure you. It is a pity that she encourages his compliments; and I ought not to flatter as he does; but young men will be young men I suppose, when there is a pretty girl in question, who has no mother to guide her."

"I leave you, Mrs. Ford, to lecture the baronet on his unpardonable flirtation, my words having no reference to him."

"Of whom then did you speak?" asked Mr. Ford, completely mystified.

"I spoke of your losing your accomplished governess, Miss. Clare; whom we intend to carry off with us to-morrow."

"This was quite unforeseen," stammered Mrs. Ford, becoming white, and then red, "I thought—I believed—that she would not turn. When did she communicate this intention to you?"

"Five minutes since in your cheerful school-room, where she now is with my father. Y

all you could to detain her, I know; but the wisest must sometimes yield to circumstances. We are all too much attached to her to hear of her seeking another home; and as some thousands will remain after a payment in full of her father's debts, she need not as a matter of duty teach A. B. C. Your generous nature will rejoice at this, as well as at the fact that the statements contained in the letter shown by you to Miss Clare are totally false. In the way, what is the writer's address?—she might be prosecuted for a libel."

"That was a private letter, Mr. Ashton; and has been destroyed, lest it should fall into other hands and pain my cousin," faltered Mrs. Ashton, trembling from head to foot, though she strove to conceal her agitation.

"Has it really been destroyed?" asked Herbert, fixing his searching eye upon her.

"I have already said so;" she replied, but looking away. "I considered that Cecil ought to see it. It was a painful duty to show it to

her; but I felt I could not avoid it as she entertained, what I then believed to be, an erroneous idea of her situation."

"Very magnanimous of you to perform such a painful duty;—and of course it must have been very painful. You will rejoice sincerely that your views and not hers were erroneous. It is hard to deprive you of the pleasure of performing painful duties, and showing so much kindness to your poor cousin; but harder still to rob you of your governess. Can I assist you in procuring another? What would you require? Reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, history, and the use of the globes! with dancing, drawing, music, harp, piano and guitar, French, Italian, Spanish and German with the principles of Latin and Greek—a good temper with a disposition to submit to orders and advice, and make herself useful in every way. Salary twenty pounds. Is that all, or have I omitted any thing? I will look out for such a one. It cannot be a difficult office—

our extreme kindness and condescension could be inducements not to be overlooked."

"Thank you, Mr. Ashton; but I do not require a governess," replied Mrs. Ford with considerable anger, not the less provoked because her tormentor's manner was exceedingly courteous, the malice sparkling in his eye alone giving a hint that his politeness was not sincere. "As Miss Clare's nearest relative, I considered it right to give her some friendly advice, which I fear she received in no friendly spirit (young people seldom bear reproof with humility); and since she prefers the protection of a stranger to that of her father's cousin, I can interfere no further, but leave her to run her own course."

"You forget that my father was her grandfather's ward, and that no relative offered her home; and I assure you Miss Clare values your advice at its true worth."

"I doubt it, Mr. Ashton; but that matters

not. When does Miss Clare purpose leaving Oakfield Villa?"

"At ten to-morrow, if perfectly convenient to you."

"Of course I shall make my pleasure hers."

"From what I see, I doubt if this will be the *enlèvement*," he continued, pointing Mrs. Ford's observation to Jemima, who was romping on the lawn, not as a girl, but a coquetting woman with Mr. Saunders, the poor navy surgeon, who showed a great desire to be allied to one of the Misses Ford; which, seemed comparatively a matter of indifference.

"What a singular character your third daughter is! so different from the common run of young ladies—so natural;—so very natural."

As Mrs. Ford could not exactly tell whether these annoying remarks were incidental or premeditated, she chose to consider them the former; and answered accordingly without any sign of anger.

Jemima is a mere girl; there is plenty of time for her to acquire the conventional manners of the world. But Lotty is there too, I

Poor child! she will be sadly grieved at parting with her cousin, to whom she is so much attached. Might I beg Miss Clare's discretion to be kept secret, lest she should hear inadvertently. I would save poor Lotty some years of sorrow if I could; and would myself inform my family of her intention the last evening to-night," said Mrs. Ford in a soft and soothing tone, though a frown was unconsciously opening on her brow, as she marked the conduct of Jemima and Mr. Saunders.

Robert Ashton looked at her steadily—he perceived the motive of her request; but for the moment his views coincided with hers.

What a beautiful thing is a mother's sensitive affection! I will be mute myself, and entrust my father and Miss Clare to be equally silent; but depend upon it her intended depar-

ture will be known to your guests and Lotty within the hour. For my part, I believe a well kept secret to be more rare than the philosopher's stone; and the idea of four people maintaining secrecy beyond twenty minutes is above credibility."

"You are severe, Mr. Ashton. I can answer for myself, if you will engage for your party."

"Not I, Mrs. Ford. I will be surety for no one's secrecy—scarcely my own; however I will do my best—depend on that."

"Thank you; it is only for poor Lotty's sake I ask it, knowing how much she will be vexed."

"Oh! certainly; only for poor Lotty's sake:—I understand. I will return to your cousin, and warn her that the credit of her sex depends on her silence."

"Do if you please; my maid shall pack all her things in the morning."

"That is so like you, Mrs. Ford; so very

derate. What say you to taking me as a
rness? I should so soon understand all
ways."

"You would not be steady enough," replied
hostess, trying to cover her annoyance with
gh.

Thinking that his victim had been sufficiently
ented, Robert returned to the school-room,
e he remained chatting with his father and
till the announcement of tea, whilst Mrs.
stepped out on the lawn to the destruc-
of Jemima's flirtation, who was sent into
house with a look which she dared not
ey.

Robert Ashton was wrong in his opinion
the secret would not be kept, if he really
tained it. Lotty went to bed, and Lord
Elwyn and Sir Thomas Willerton took their
without the slightest suspicion of Cecil's
ded departure on the morrow, though the
had sat beside her the whole evening,
sturbed by Mrs. Ford, who thought it

most prudent to let matters take their course for that one night without interfering. The wildness of the sky forbade all hope of F Water Bay on the succeeding morning; Cecil had postponed all future engagements on vague excuses which the baronet however would not receive as positive refusals.

Fitz Elwyn had kept aloof as usual, not joining in her conversation with his friend, and never addressing her but when required to do so by politeness; and whilst Sir Thomas shook hands at parting, the viscount's salutation was a cold and formal bow.

"Sir Thomas Willerton is inclined to play the fool with Miss Clare; and it is quite well that she is going to leave the neighbourhood; for she seems positively enchanted with his coxcombical attentions," remarked Robert to his father, as they were returning to Milford where their servant had procured them beds.

"If you mean by playing the fool, wishing to make Cecil, Lady Willerton, I agree with

; but I consider that a mark of wisdom, not of folly; and he is no coxcomb," replied his father quietly.

Depend upon it Miss Clare will never be Lady Willerton; the baronet has no serious matrimonial intentions," returned Robert sharp-setting down the glass with a violence that threatened its destruction, though he had pulled it up but a minute before. "You judge too rashly of every one, sir. Sir Thomas Willerton is an arrant coxcomb; and his stately and the viscount not a whit superior—nay, worse."

Something has crossed you to-night, Robert. Rely upon it Sir Thomas is in earnest, regards Cecil; and intends to persuade her to become Lady Willerton; and as for either of the young men being coxcombs, I have not discovered it. The baronet deals a little in verbole; but is lively, pleasant, and good tempered; whilst his friend is a very superior

young man. I longed to mention Cecil's parture and invite them to Ashton Grove."

"It is much better that you did not, sir; my part, I like neither of them," replied son, thrusting his head out of the window look at the weather, though it was raining hard at the moment.

There was a general exclamation of surprise when Mrs. Ford informed her family and Hattons that Cecil was to leave Oakfield in the morning.

Mr. Ford looked at his wife as much as to say—"this is your bad management;"—whereupon Mrs. Hatton remarked that change of air would do Cecil good, and doubtless Sir Thomas would soon follow; at which prediction the Mr. Ford tossed their heads, saying—that they were not so sure of that.

Maria Hatton said something kind of poor governess; and her sister observed she was very ungrateful to think of leaving dear, kind Mrs. Ford.

Poor Lotty, when informed of the fact, was utter despair; no soothing could stop her tears—no persuasions induce her to quit Cecil a moment.

"I shall have nobody to make me good now; and no one to teach me any thing, for I can never learn with mamma; and I shall never see you again, Cecil. I wish you had not come, you are going away so soon," cried the sobbing Lotty, throwing her arms round her cousin's neck, as she was going to put on her bonnet.

"Yes, yes, dear child; we will hope better things. You must mind all that I have said to you; and should I ever have a home of my own, you shall come and stay with me."

"Shall I? shall I indeed, dear Cecil? When you marry Sir Thomas Willerton, or Lord Fitzwryn shall I come and see you?"

"Do not talk nonsense Lotty,; I shall never marry either," replied Cecil quickly, half putting away the child.

"Oh! but it is no nonsense, cousin Cecil, for I heard Mrs. Hatton tell mamma that she would be sure to marry one or the other; you would not blush and tremble so if it were all nonsense."

The entrance of Mrs. Hatton, who came to say something kind, saved Lotty from further rebuke, and Cecil from further confusion.

The carriage arrived at the appointed time, the 'good byes' were all exchanged—Lotty had her last kiss; and Cecil was handed in to Beckington Ford, who with the prospect of grouse shooting before him had been particularly civil for the last twelve hours.

"I shall soon have a house of my own where I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you," said Beckington Ford, shaking hands with Robert Ashton.

"Thanks. I receive your hospitable invitation as it deserves. Bye the bye, you are very fond of grouse shooting—are you not? you said so last night, I think."

"Excessively fond of it!—dote upon it I may say," replied Mr. Beckington Ford, his eyes gleaming with delight.

"What a pity that I had not known it sooner! My friend Lord Edward Lister has just disposed of his estate in Yorkshire," said Robert Ashton, as he sprang into the carriage, leaving Beckington Ford standing at the hall door with the blank look of disappointment, regretting the waste of so much civility.

"Man wants but little here below ;"

asserts the poet. We leave the other sex to settle that point as they please ; but we maintain that woman wants a great deal ; and though shocked to be compelled to admit the truth of the libel, cannot in justice deny that ladies, particularly young single ladies, do occasionally grieve to-day for what they rejoiced in the day before. Why this is, we will let wiser heads determine, lest we should, like some modern philosophers, mistake cause for effect ; we only

assert the fact, leaving others to found a theory thereon. All Tuesday and Wednesday Cecil Clare longed to be at Ashton Grove, and to do Ashton any thing else, rather than at Oakfield Villa, or in the neighbourhood of Milford; and on Thursday morning she breathed a deep, despairing sigh as the carriage drove away from both; and so far was her head turned back to catch a last glimpse of Alum Bay, the lighthouse, and the cliffs, that Robert warned her with confused bluntness of the fate of the American owl, that it had wrung off its own neck.

After such a warning of course her head was kept within the window; but her eye rested when it could on the scene of the water part, and she appeared to take great pleasure in watching a pretty yacht that was working her way through the Needles. The yacht was a cutter, about the size of the *Miranda*; but her rig and foresail were of a different cut, which might easily have been seen by any one versed in such matters.

Perhaps Cecil did not know which was the jib or the foresail; and thought all vessels of the same size were rigged exactly alike—the sails all cut and hoisted after one fashion; or perhaps, at that moment, she forgot that there might be other cutters in the R. Y. C.; as we said before, we must beg to be excused from endeavouring to thread the labyrinth of a maiden's mind.

Thanks to Robert's activity, the business with Mr. Blackwall was speedily arranged; and in due time, Cecil reached Ashton Grove, looking decidedly worse than when she had left it; but very much better than when she had quit-
ted Oakfield Villa. It is needless to say that she was warmly welcomed by all the family, including the youngest daughter Sarah, a handsome girl about seventeen, who had coaxed her parents, against their judgment, to let her leave school; and the youngest son Charles, a merry, thoughtless youth a few months older; who

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. ASHTON and her party were early at Summerland (when was Mrs. Ashton late there, unless when delayed by her indolent husband and irregular boys) but early as it was, Mr. Fleetwood was ready to hand to assist her from the carriage, and express his pleasure in seeing Cecil look so much better than on his return; for this was not their first meeting after that event.

She was looking better; and to please

Ashton had laid aside her first deep mourning ; and was trying to be gay. Trying to be gay ! what does not that expression convey to the bleeding heart ? We may stand by the sea and strive to laugh—but grief comes in on the rolling waves ;—we may sit in the covert of deep woods, away from all who would pain us ; yet the rustling of a leaf—the murmur of the breeze among the branches, will renew the pangs of the wounded heart ;—we may sport on the velvet lawn ; and the glading of a sun beam—the song of a happy bird—the flitting of a gaudy butterfly—the delicate scent of some lovely flower—ay, the chirp of a grasshopper—the veriest nothing will recall a host of painful recollections. We may look into the placid lake—the summer sky—the wintry fire—ay, even on a plain stone wall, and yet in each and all mark the iron impress of the past. Oh ! memory what a mighty thing thou art ! the unconquerable tyrant of the heart. What hath thy power to soothe and to destroy ? We

may propitiate, though we cannot defy them. We may try to be gay—we should try to be cheerful; but it is a hard task, as many a man has felt beside Cecil Clare.

As for Sarah, she was the very personification of youthful delight. It was her first appearance in public—she was no longer a girl—she was a woman. Ah! little did she think how soon that woman might have cause to wish herself again a girl. Then Sarah was handsome, lively, good-tempered, and, as her brother remarked, not so clever as to alarm the beaux; and those beaux being a novelty to her, she had a smile and a gay word for each without thinking of any thing more than having partners for her first ball. Sarah Arden was decidedly the happiest person in Summerland. It was a pretty scene the Archery meeting, with a tolerably picturesque house standing back in a wood—a velvet lawn in front, on which the sun shone joyously sloping down to a pretty stream with weeping

lows, and swans, and reedy islands; whilst all dressed females wandered about in straggling groups, escorted by polite cavaliers.

"What a gay and amusing scene! No one can be unhappy here to-day;" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, who was in her element, watching the fresh arrivals, describing them to Cecil, and addressing all she knew—a word to this, and a word to that;—now asking Captain Wilder about the inventor of the machine, with the unpronounceable name, that she could never remember—now questioning Mrs. Praed concerning her farm—then turning to others and enquiring after fathers and mothers—uncles and aunts—brothers and sisters—nephews and nieces—little babies and grown up sons and daughters, even to the third and fourth cousins, with a sympathy truly catholic; advising, congratulating, and condoling, as the case might require.

"There are the Prynnes come, I see. I must just go and ask after their mother, poor

both would be to place me out of the pale of civilised society at once;—add authoress to the other two—and the climax would be complete, and I might go live in the woods—

“ *A sisterless Abbess the last of my race.*”

“ I will be your confessor,” exclaimed Robert Ashton, who though standing near had hitherto taken little share in the conversation.

“ I meant to have applied for that office,” said Mr. Fleetwood vexed at being forestalled.

“ You are too late,” observed Robert with an emphasis that struck both his hearers.

“ I will live alone in my wild domain ; I have no father confessor,” said Cecil proudly.

“ You fear confession ;—and you are right,” observed Robert with a look from which Cecil shrank.

“ What do you think of the Barringhams, my dear ? There is Lady Babara Hetherington, Lady Fitz Elwyn that is to be. Did not I

Fleetwood point her out to you?" enquired Mrs. Ashton coming back at the moment, half breathless with her bustling.

Cecil started at this address; it was natural that she should, having no idea that Mrs. Ashton was again close beside her.

"You are looking the wrong way;—there is Lady Barbara Hetherton," said Robert, pointing in exactly the opposite direction to that in which Cecil had been gazing.

She turned her eyes as directed. First came Lady Barringham; tall, large, with finely formed, but inexpressive features, and a stately mien: at her side, but a little behind, was Lady Barbara Hetherton, who would have been considered a beauty by the generality of observers had she even been devoid of that beautifier title. She had a brilliant complexion, and well formed face, though rather full; large, sleepy grey eyes; and a commanding figure.

"I beg your pardon for not having introduced Lady Barbara Hetherton to your notice;

but I was not aware that you took such an interest in her ladyship," said Mr. Fleetwood, finding that Cecil's observation continued fixed on the titled belle. "What do you think of her?"

"Think of her?" repeated Cecil involuntarily, as if unconscious of the meaning of his words, which had roused her from a reverie. Then, recovering herself, she hastened to reply. "She is very handsome; but to me not attractive. She has the beauty of form and feature, but none of the beauty of expression; and her manner seems cold and studied. I should judge her deficient in energy, and warmth of heart."

"Exactly so, Miss Clare; you have read her character at a glance, or rather her want of character. She is the handsome, indolent woman of fashion, with neither strength of mind, originality of thought, nor warmth of heart. I do not envy Lord Fitz Elwyn his bride. Give me features that light up a

hope, and joy, and pity—ever changing their expression. I prefer feeling to fashion; and her manner is as you say *maniéré*.”

“Do not quote me on this subject. Mr. Fleetwood,” observed Cecil colouring. “I am vexed with myself for having spoken as I did of Lady Barbara; it was worse than presumption in me even to guess at her merits or demerits, after such a casual glance, and without ever having heard her speak, or been introduced to her.”

“You are too scrupulous, Miss Clare. You have said nothing more than the truth, I assure you, though I am surprised at the quickness of your penetration.”

“It does not deserve the name of penetration, being only a hasty and not very charitable guess. I entreat you to forget my remarks,” said Cecil earnestly.

“I must repeat, Miss Clare, that you are too scrupulous. Why should you blame yourself for only discovering the truth?”

"Your eloquence is wasted, Fleetwood," served Robert Ashton. "You cannot persuade Miss Clare of her perfect innocence in the matter; she is scrupulous—very scrupulous in some things, and I see is set on condemning herself for her strictures on Lord Fitz Elwyn's bride elect. I only hope that she will be equally charitable towards me."

"I would purposely speak hardly of no one, though, carried away by my high spirits, I sometimes say what the next moment I wish unsaid," replied Cecil coldly.

"I do not understand such a tender conscience. Do you intend to patronise Lady Barbara? become her bosom friend—and call her up as perfection?"

"You mean, I suppose, do I intend to get Lady Barbara to patronise me: to talk of my patronising any one, particularly an Earl's daughter, is a misuse of the term."

"Oh! you wish her to patronise you, and

make you her most intimate friend ; I will procure you an introduction."

"No, no;" cried Cecil hurriedly, turning to speak to Miss Knight, who was standing near.

"Dear me, who can those gentlemen be in that handsome curricie? Two very elegant young men. They are standing up in the carriage as if to look over the lawn ; and now they have both jumped out, and are coming this way," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton. "Who can they be? I do think they must be seeking some one in particular ; and they are certainly coming this way, edging through the crowd as fast as they can. If I knew whom they wanted, I daresay I could help them ; for I could tell where almost any one might be found."

"My dear mother, do let the young gentlemen find their friends themselves. No one thanks you for all the pains you take in their behalf," observed her eldest son, who was often provoked at his mother's kind, but injudicious offers of assistance.

"We ought to help each other in this much as we can ; I am afraid you will be selfish when an old man," replied Mrs. As

"I am afraid I am very selfish as a young one," said Robert frankly.

"I declare the strangers are coming towards us ; yet I cannot make them out at all. Look, Emma, and see if you know any thing of them."

Emma, who had only just rejoined her mother, having been on another part of the lawn with the Wilders, looked as desired ; but could give no information as to the identity of the strangers.

"You have not stared at these lions, Mr. Clare," observed Robert in a mocking tone.

Cecil looked where Emma had looked before, and saw Sir Thomas Willerton making his way towards her as fast as the crowd would permit, dragging Lord Fitz Elwyn after him, who instead of appearing as happy as his friend

seemed half inclined to remonstrate with him for his impetuosity.

“Do you know them, Cecil?” asked Mrs. Ashton.

Cecil was very busy arranging her scarf; and did not hear—at least did not reply.

“Oh! yes, Miss Clare knows them. They are particular friends of hers.”

“Particular friends of Cecil’s, Robert?” questioned Mrs. Ashton in surprise.

“Yes: very particular friends.”

Mrs. Ashton had no time to make further enquiries, or express further wonder; for Sir Thomas, having caught sight of Cecil, was at her side, whilst just behind him stood Lord Fitz Elwyn.

The baronet’s greeting satisfied Mrs. Ashton as to the truth of Roberts’s assertion;—never was joy more strongly depicted in human countenance than in that of Sir Thomas Wil- lerton, as he shook hands with Cecil.

“What a happiness to see you again Miss

Clare ! I cannot tell which is greatest, my at this meeting, or my sorrow on learning departure from Milford, which Mrs. would fain have kept concealed. That good, little creature Lotty told me were to you ; or I should infallibly have flung myself off the cliffs in despair."

" A male Sappho ! I hope you wrote odes first, Sir Thomas," observed Robert caustically.

" I beg your pardon, Mr. Ashton, for seeing you before ;" said Sir Thomas, far happier to think of analysing his sarcasm, shaking hands with a warmth which Robert half ashamed of his ill humour. Fitz Elwyn only bowed ;—it was all he could do to Cecil.

" I would have flown after you immediately," continued the baronet, turning towards Clare ; " but a plaguy engagement to my old aunt stood in the way ; that fulfilled I travelled day and night to meet you here

day. You can vouch for the rapidity of our journey Fitz Elwyn."

"Undoubtedly. I had only two hours sleep last night; and not many more the night before."

"For shame, Fitz. I allowed you four," that is you stayed four hours at S——; but two hours out of these four you talked incessantly; and I have a very bad habit of not being able to sleep when people talk."

"You cannot assert that the subject of my discourse was 'stale, flat, and unprofitable.'"

"No; too exciting!—and therefore the more likely to murder sleep," replied Fitz Elwyn with a sudden contraction of the brow, that passed away on the instant. "Should I be pronounced intolerably stupid to-day, Willerton, you must bear the blame," he added.

"Thou shameless man! Was it not all to bring you into Miss Clare's presence;—and are you not now basking in the sunshine of her smile?"

"Then Miss Clare must bear the blame. Should your lordship be stupid to-day we might understand her to be the cause," remarked Robert Ashton.

"Pray bring no such unjust accusation against me. I can have no influence over Lord Fitz Elwyn's mood," observed Cecil, with a mingling of confusion and hauteur.

"I brought no such accusation against Miss Clare," replied the viscount with haughty air, at least equal to her own.

"You would deserve to be guillotined if you had, Fitz Elwyn. A true knight defends all peerless damsels, instead of accusing them. But alack and a well-a-day, you are so deficient in gallantry, not to protest that your mood is not only influenced, but absolutely ruled by Miss Clare—that you live but in her smiles—should perish beneath her frowns."

"I fear Miss Clare would not believe me if I said so."

"My credulity does not extend beyo—"

possibilities," answered Cecil with her former lofty tone.

"Ah! Fitz: truly has it been said, that the days of chivalry are gone," exclaimed Sir Thomas laughing. "What true knight would fail to tell a lady of his entire devotion, or to pledge himself to impossibilities for her sake, from the fear of being disbelieved. A few particles of the gallantry and knightly devotion of former days still linger in this material world; and those few are concentrated in me; so I pray you, Miss Clare, to accept of me, unworthy representative as I am of the heroes of olden times, as your devoted cavalier throughout the day—your partner in the first dance at least. I understand each lady is to have her attendant esquire to bear her arrows and bend her bow."

"It is impossible to resist such wonderful humility," answered Cecil gaily, taking his offered arm

"Victory! Victory! Now shall I win the

prize to a certainty," exclaimed Sir Th with a triumphant glance at Fleetwood, intuitive feeling of jealousy hinting at that gentleman's inclination to become his rival. "Understand the rules? I think some one told Fitz, that this being an extraordinary archery meeting, under the rule of rather an extraordinary steward, strangers and members were to have an equal chance. The prizes to be four—for ladies and two for gentlemen; bracelets for the former, and silver arrows for the latter. The Robin Hoods, who win the arrows, to have the honour of clasping on the bracelets. Of course Miss Clare you win the first bracelet and the first silver arrow; with such a spur to ambition I shall outshoot myself as well as my rivals."

"You will have many competitors," remarked Mr. Fleetwood, looking any thing but pleased at the lively baronet's presumptuous appropriation of Cecil.

"The more the better! I will outstrip the

all," replied Sir Thomas boldly, meeting his rival's look of vexation with one of defiance.

Mrs. Ashton's introduction to the strangers by Robert, at her request, prevented further remark or rejoinder.

"So you really are come at last, Lord Fitz Elwyn!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, after the proper interchange of bows and courtesies. "For the last six weeks I have heard of your being expected at Lindmoor every day."

"Then I fear you are tired of me before my arrival," replied his lordship with a good-humoured smile, and comprehending her character at once.

"Oh! no my lord; very glad to meet you at your own time. As our lands join, I hope we shall be good neighbours, and see a great deal of each other; which I am sorry to say was not the case with the late earl."

"You are very good," replied the viscount politely; but the smile had vanished. "I should have found Lindmoor lonely without

my father and mother, who were unexpectedly detained in Dorsetshire by my aunt's illness, so I preferred the Miranda as an abode, the gaiety of Willerton to keep off ennui."

"But you are going to Lindmoor now, I hope."

"After this meeting; and my parents will join me there in a few days."

"Mr. Ashton and my sons will do themselves the honor of calling immediately."

"I should apologise for not having enquired after Mr. Ashton. I flatter myself that we were mutually pleased at our first meeting."

"I can answer for my husband's pleasure," replied the gratified Mrs. Ashton.

"Come gentlemen! each select the lady who is to be the object of his care for the evening," cried the merry steward, who had the principal share in the rather novel arrangements of the meeting.

Thus adjured, Mr. Fleetwood offered his arm to Emma, who accepted it with an

glance at Cecil. Sarah was already provided with a cavalier; and Lord Fitz Elwyn moved off to make his selection.

"His lordship is a very pleasant, elegant young man; and seems inclined to be friendly; but he is not near as lively as Sir Thomas Willerton; and does not appear to me to be quite happy," remarked Mrs. Ashton.

"Quite happy! I should like to know who is?" replied her son, marching off towards the Wilders; but Miss Wilder was leaning on Edward's arm, and Miss Knight had some time before been provided with a cavalier, so Robert requested permission to devote himself to Miss Power, a request most graciously granted, though the gentleman's manner was not very flattering, and his mood throughout the day reckless and strange.

When Cecil next saw Fitz Elwyn he was conversing in a low voice with Lady Barbara Hetherton, whilst Lady Barringham looked approval.

The precedence in shooting was to be decided by lot; the ladies drawing, and attendant gentlemen taking the same number. Each person was to have three shots;—first the ladies shooting once—then all the gentlemen,—the prizes to be awarded to the arrows nearest the centre of the bull's eye.

The first shots from ladies and gentlemen were rather wild; but the second round exhibited more skill.

“Blow, trumpets, blow! Miss Clare’s arrow is in the bull’s eye,” shouted Sir Thomas Hetherton in great delight to the attendant musicians. Whilst Cecil drew back blushing and surprised at her own success.

This announcement caused more animation and competition among the ladies; but a dangerous rival appeared at the conclusion of the round; Miss Wilder’s arrow was the nearest and close beside it was one shot by Barbara Hetherton.

“Now for the honor of clasping on

bracelet !” whispered Sir Thomas to Cecil as he left her to take his place before the target.

It was a good shot—close to the inner circle ; but still a little—a very little behind Mr. Fleetwood’s arrow ; and the gentlemen looked at each other not very graciously.

Cecil’s third arrow fell sufficiently near the centre to prove that her former success had not been merely accidental. Some of the ladies were despairing—most nervous ; but Lady Barbara Hetherton on receiving her arrow from Lord Fitz Elwyn’s hand , placed it carefully in her bow ; and took a steady, deliberate aim. There was no timid trembling of the hand, only a slight flushing of the cheek, and a hurried glance at Cecil that showed her ambitious of conquest.

“ A bull’s eye ! a bull’s eye ! the very centre !” shouted some of the beaux who crowded round her handsome ladyship, whilst the horns sent forth a loud and joyous blast, and Lady Barbara’s friends were profuse in their congratulations.

Sir Thomas was vexed; and would have expressed his regret to Cecil; but Cecil was looking on the ground, and her bonnet hid her changing cheek. And why did the cheek change, and the lip quiver, when Cecil declared that morning, and with truth, she had no wish for victory, and only sought to please Mrs. Ashton?

"Only half a bull's eye," exclaimed Fleetwood, eyeing the target.

"A fair tilting ground for the champion of the two ladies," cried a merry old gentleman.

"You will be my champion Lord Elwyn;" said Lady Barbara, in her sweetest tone, with a look that some of her admirers would have knelt to receive. Cecil could not catch his lordship's reply, it was uttered in so low a voice; but she saw him walk immediately towards the target to take part in the examination.

"I am your champion, Miss Clare, and will do your favors," cried Sir Thomas taking a w

rose from the bouquet she held in her hand ere she guessed his purpose; and hurrying after the viscount.

"You are clearly the conqueror," exclaimed the baronet rejoining her in a few minutes. "The umpires have decided in your favor, and Fitz Elwyn is obliged to give up the claim of his '*faire Ladye*.' Let me be the first to congratulate you."

"It does not matter;" observed Cecil quickly, instead of thanking him for his congratulations.

"Yes; but it does matter a great deal, Miss Clare; I intend to be victor; and encouraged by your good wishes shall be sure to succeed. Besides, I do not admire Lady Barbara's manner; instead of delicately standing aloof like you, she pressed forward, showing a personal rivalry:—I wish some other lady would cut her out."

Sir Thomas wished in vain; no other lady approached so near as to give rise to a doubt (Emma Ashton came the next) and to Cecil

Clare and Lady Barbara Hetherton were prizes awarded.

If Lady Barbara had appeared to take ground, Mr. Fleetwood appeared to take more; and his third arrow was a quarter of an inch in advance of his second.

"Beat him! cut him out! Do not let him have the honor of clasping on her bracelet," whispered Sir Thomas in strong excitement to Lord Fitz Elwyn, as his lordship advanced to take his turn. "My great anxiety may cause me to fail; but I would rather that one should win than Fleetwood; he is my rival, I am sure; and as such I hate him already."

"I will do my best. He shall not win!" replied Fitz Elwyn with the lofty glance of a bent on conquest and conscious of his power.

And better he could not have done; his arrow stood next to Cecil's, exactly in the centre of the bull's eye.

"I never saw a finer shot, or a more graceful and commanding attitude," observed an old gentleman within Cecil's hearing. "He and Lady Barbara will make a handsome couple; they bear the belle to-day, though there are several pretty women, and fine young men on the ground."

"His lordship will not ask my advice, or I should rather recommend that young lady in mourning. She is pale, and evidently in ill health; but there is more of nature in her gracefulness; and far more mind in her countenance."

"Pooh, Monckton! Who wants mind in a woman? Let her be handsome, gentle, and good-tempered—what should a man desire more?"

"Lord Fitz Elwyn is of your opinion I conclude," replied Mr. Monckton drily.

"Control yourself, Willerton; you are absolutely shaking with anxiety," whispered Fitz Elwyn as his friend's turn approached.

"So I am. I have a kind of superstitious feeling that if I do not beat Fleetwood, I lose—"

"Your senses, if they are not lost already," interposed the viscount.

"I cannot think what you are made of, Elwyn, to take every thing so calmly—so calmly. You are not in love, say what you will, you never could have shot so steadily."

Fitz Elwyn turned away with another contraction of that noble brow; but from the moment that his friend's arrow was placed in his bow his gaze became fixed on his movements with a painful intensity, as if he entertained some superstitious feeling as to result.

The arrow flew straightly and steadily, falling in the target between those of Mr. Fleetwood, and the viscount.

"I have beaten him however!" said Thomas in a half suppressed tone of triumph, whilst Mr. Fleetwood walked away unable

conceal his annoyance, though endeavouring to jest on his own defeat.

The other shots were not worth recording. The judges announced that Miss Clare, and Lord Fitz Elwyn were entitled to the first prizes—Lady Barbara Hetherton and Sir Thomas Willerton to the second ; and that the bracelets and silver arrows would be presented after dinner, to which the whole party then adjourned.

“You are a happy man, Fitz Elwyn,” remarked Sir Thomas to his friend, as he met him in the passage going to give a message to his servant.

“Am I ?” replied Fitz Elwyn with a blighted smile.

“To be sure you are. Who can doubt it? Is not Miss Clare to receive the prize from you?”

“She will not prize it the more for that.”

“Not if you clasp it on with such a gloomy face. One would take you for the vanquished

instead of the victor; I should be wild delight if I were you."

"Should you;" remarked Fitz Elwyn with a look of incredulity.

"To be sure, man! But I forgot; our lives are tangled; and that mischievous Puck poured the juice of the Pansy on the widdows. You should clasp the bracelet on Barbara's arm. Could not we arrange it? It is something to have outdone that fellow Fleetwood, and you I know will never be his rival; honor and affection alike forbid it; if I could only change with you in this point I should feel assured of success in my fondest hopes. Give me this proof of friendship, Fitz; and I shall be your debtor for the rest of my life."

"Miss Clare might feel offended;—the stewards might object," replied his lordship hesitating, and looking down as he spoke.

"I will answer for Miss Clare's not objecting, as somehow or other, I doubt your b

a favourite of hers; besides, I heard her say that she thought it a very silly arrangement; and we can soon talk over the stewards;—Lady Barbara's will is law, to one of them at least. May I go and settle it so with Miss Clare?"

"I should be sorry to thwart her wishes," replied Fitz Elwyn proudly, but the lofty air was lost on Sir Thomas, who hurried off to secure the accomplishment of his wishes.

"Oh! Miss Clare, I am come to solicit you to divest yourself of some of your rightful glory in favor of a humble petitioner. You can claim to receive the bracelet from the first victor—will you submit to receive it from the second? By so doing you will make me the happiest of mortals; and as you may judge, Fitz Elwyn the same."

"I am to understand then that it is his lordship's wish as much as yours."

"Can you doubt it? He will then have the pleasure of presenting his bracelet to Lady Barbara. Your consent alone is wanting, for

we can easily win the stewards to our wish and your consent will bestow inestimable favors upon two."

"I leave every thing to you and Lord Fitz Elwyn;—arrange all as you please," said Cecil coldly.

"Thanks! thanks! a thousand thanks!" cried the enraptured baronet, not remarking the coldness of her assent, or attributing it to maiden bashfulness. "You will still have the handsomest bracelet," he added as he left her to seek the stewards.

"No, no; I yield all to Lady Barbara," said Cecil quickly and proudly too.

"I have settled it all with Miss Clara Fitz Elwyn; so now come with me to the stewards."

"Then Miss Clare made no objection."

"Objection? I will not wound your vanity by reporting how readily she yielded; but you know I do not stand with her as a stranger or even an indifferent acquaintance. Wh

I have time to think of any thing but my fiery love I must make you and Miss Clare better friends. You will have no difficulty in persuading Lady Barbara to the substitution, I conclude," he added looking arch.

"I shall not make the attempt; but simply tell her that it has been so arranged on account of her rank, and our having been the respective cavaliers of the two ladies."

"That will do capitally; I declare your calm, commanding manner settles things better than all my warmth and energy. Miss Clare talked of giving up the handsomest bracelet, saying that she would yield all to Lady Barbara; but—"

"Of course, that must not be;" interposed Fitz Elwyn.

"The stewards were very persuadable; and we have arranged the substitution on the plea of her ladyship's rank, and Fitz Elwyn's having been her devoted esquire," whispered Sir Thomas as he handed Cecil in to dinner. "The

prizes are to be given after dessert, in the presence of all."

"I have such a horror of being stared at by Sir Thomas, that I must request you to make the ceremony as brief, and as little remarkable as possible," said Cecil in the same low tone.

"All shall be as you wish. There are times when the heart is too full of happiness for words or lips to speak."

This was said in such an earnest tone that Cecil looked steadily at him for a moment, then turned away with a crimson flush.

"I wish I were you! I should so like to have won the first prize!" observed Sarah Ashton.

"You know not what you wish. You are too young in experience as in years," answered Cecil warningly.

"You, on the contrary, are a sage old philosopher," remarked a voice beside her.

She turned and caught Robert's eye fixed keenly on her. She had a great dislike to those keen looks, and the marked emphasis

with which he sometimes spoke ; but they were things for which she could scarcely show resentment ; and there were times when he was kind and gentle as a brother.

Mrs. Ashton's party chanced to be seated nearly opposite Lady Barringham's ; and a very merry party it seemed :—was it only seeming ?

Sir Thomas Willerton and Cecil maintained a lively conversation during the repast ;—Mr. Fleetwood and Emma did their best to equal them in gaiety—Robert flirted furiously with Miss Power, talking a great deal of clever nonsense ; whilst Lady Barbara looked perfectly happy conversing in a low voice with Lord Fitz Elwyn, who answered her in the same subdued tone. Edward Ashton appeared very comfortably established between Miss Wilder and Miss Knight, whilst Sarah and Charles enjoyed all around them with the buoyant spirits of early youth.

Dinner ended, dessert succeeded ; and then came the moment for the presentation of the

prizes ; one of the stewards, as had been agreed on, stating why the former arrangement was to be in some slight degree departed from.

Lady Barbara received hers from Lord Elwyn with the self-possession of one accustomed from her childhood to be flattered and followed ; her eyes sparkled with triumph ; the rose did not deepen on her cheek, and her braceleted hand did not tremble. His manner and address were graceful, but grave ; he hinted that the beautifully moulded arm needed ornament to set it off ; and her manner was a tacit admission that she acknowledged the truth of his remark. She was not ignorant of her attractions ;—she liked the homage that it procured her ; and rejoiced in this partial triumph.

The bracelet destined for Cecil was far more valuable. It was composed of exquisite carving and might, from the grace of the designs, and the beauty of the execution, have won the admiration of the most stoical ; yet it was evid-

that she looked upon it with indifference if not dislike—that she shrank from the ceremony of presentation, and would have gladly given up the bauble, beautiful as it was, to have been spared that public triumph in which her ladyship delighted. In compliance with her wish, Sir Thomas merely said that he felt much honored in bestowing the prize won by her skill; but his softened look and tone revealed what his lips did not venture to disclose.

In spite of every effort, Cecil's hand shook as the bracelet was clasped upon it; and as she turned aside to avoid general observation Robert saw that her cheek was of an ashy paleness.

For an hour or two the company strolled on the lawn, and through the grounds; or shot in parties, according to their own pleasure; then the ladies having taken off their bonnets and arranged their hair the whole assemblage adjourned to the ball-room.

“Will you be our *vis-à-vis*?” asked Sir

Thomas as Fitz Elwyn passed him to lead on Lady Barbara.

The viscount nodded assent ; and Sir Thomas remarked to Cecil, whose side he had scarcely left throughout the day :—

“ We should stand opposite to each other being the victors. I am afraid you do not like my friend as much as I would have you like him ; his coldness is only seeming, I assure you. Under that frigid exterior, beats one of the warmest of hearts, and most unselfish spirits. Though only a few months older, his steady judgment and candid friendship have saved me from innumerable faults and follies to use no harsher names.”

Cecil looked none the colder on her partner for this frank eulogium on his friend ; but a call to take their places precluded a reply.

It was Cecil's first scene of gaiety since her parents' death, now nine months since ; and it was natural that the circumstance should strike on her memory, and fill her mind with painful

thoughts. She had only consented to dance at Mrs. Ashton's earnest entreaties; and when the music struck up, she grew paler and paler, shuddering when her hand first touched the hands of Lord Fitz Elwyn and Lady Barbara in pursuance of the figure of the quadrille; and so pallid did she become, that she overheard her ladyship remark it; and on looking up met the viscount's eyes fixed anxiously upon her. The consciousness of being observed roused her to exertion; and controlling all show of painful emotion, by a powerful effort, she concluded the dance if not with spirit, yet with a grace that rendered her apparent languor a subject of admiration to many of the spectators, who never guessed the agony that caused her languid step.

No sooner was the dance concluded, than Mr. Fleetwood claimed her as his partner; and Sir Thomas, having failed to convince her of the propriety of retaining him as her cavalier throughout the evening as well as the morning,

was compelled to resign her, and console herself with Emma, who, before the close of the set, had won herself the second place in esteem by her warm praise of Cecil; and with patience with which she listened to his like rhapsodies.

“Miss Ashton is a very nice girl; so warm-hearted—so much attached to her friends—next to Miss Clare, she is the nicest girl I know,” was Sir Thomas Willerton’s thought; he resigned her to her mother; and he sought Cecil, whom he had secured as his *d-vis*, much to Fleetwood’s annoyance; Cecil was not in the dancing-room:—she quitted it just before with Edward Ashton, who, hearing her complain of the heat, had taken her into an outer apartment, which was much cooler and nearly deserted.

“The fatigue and excitement have been much for you,” he remarked with his usual considerate kindness, as he felt how heavily she hung on his arm.

She did not speak—her whole frame shook ; and when he caught a glimpse of her bent face, it was as the face of a corpse. It was not the first time this day that the lip and cheek had been white as marble.

“ You are ill—you are fainting. Let me call my mother !” exclaimed Edward in alarm.

“ No, no : call no one ; I am quite well now, or shall be in a minute,” answered Cecil, controlling the weakness of the body, as she had done before, by the power of the mind. “ The ball-room was so very warm ;—a few minutes in this cool and quiet apartment will quite restore me.”

“ I doubt it,” replied her companion shaking his head, as he led her to a seat. “ You are not strong enough yet to play the rake.”

“ I fear not ; but you must keep this a secret for to-night at least. I hate observation ; and have already attracted too much.”

“ I will not betray you against your will ; but the ball has only just begun, and will be

kept up till late. How will you be able to endure it for some hours longer?"

"I cannot tell," replied Cecil in such a despairing tone, and with such a fitful fire in her eye, that Edward grew more and more alarmed.

"You are afraid of my kind mother's fussing, I can see that; but something must be done. I am sure you could not stand if you tried. Let me call Miss Wilder!—she has been watching you all day, one moment talking so gaily, and the next looking so fearfully ill. I will answer for her discretion; and she is always ready in any emergency."

A smile played round Cecil's lips at his confidence in Miss Wilder's discretion, and his proposition to summon her instead of his sister; but it was chased away by a sigh.

Without fathoming all her thoughts, he read enough to awaken a blushing consciousness; but seeing Miss Wilder standing alone in the doorway at the moment, he took Cecil's

silence for consent, and advancing towards her explained sufficient to induce her to hurry to Miss Clare, and offer her services with a zeal, yet judgment, that proved her possessed of the discretion imputed to her.

“The air has been very oppressive for an invalid; and you have been exerting yourself to seem gay, when your heart was sad; I could see that, though I have had little cause for sadness myself; and now you are afraid of confessing faintness, lest you should be stared at, talked to, and condoled with; perhaps paragraphed in the County Chronicle. Would you like to go home immediately, if I could manage it for you quietly?”

“Yes, very much!” replied Cecil looking almost as admiringly at Helen as Edward himself. “But I do not see how that can be managed, so I will endeavour to bear the heat; for Emma and Sarah are enjoying themselves greatly.”

“You are a dear, kind soul, always thinking

more of others than yourself, as Mr. Edward Ashton says," cried Helen warmly; "but you must submit to me now. I know mamma is tired and anxious to go home; and it will be very little out of our way to set you down at Ashton Grove."

"No;" said Cecil decidedly; "that would be taking you away from a gay and happy scene. If Mrs. Wilder will give me a seat, you can occupy my place in Mrs. Ashton's carriage."

"Ay, that is just the thing! What a capital contriver you are!" cried Edward Ashton; "and so considerate for every body."

Cecil and Helen smiled; and the latter went to arrange the matter thus with her parents.

"It is all settled, dear Miss Clare," she said, returning after a few minutes absence. "Papa is gone for the carriage, which will soon be ready; and I have told him that you are very tired and must not be worried about his new bridge, or the *Pferdknabewasscrunger*; so he will leave you in peace. And now shall I go

and tell Mrs. Ashton, that you are too much fatigued to stay ; and that she is to take charge of troublesome me ?”

“ A thousand thanks for what you have done, and what you purpose doing, dear Helen,” said Cecil, truly grateful for the attentions of the warm hearted girl, whose high spirits never led her into forgetfulness of the feelings of others ; “ but I think I had better go and tell Mrs. Ashton so myself, or, in her kindness, she will be sure to fancy that I am dying, and so hurry you all away that she may soothe my death-bed.”

“ I should not wonder if she did ; but never think of that ; you are not equal to the exertion.”

“ It ought to be done--and I will do it,” replied Cecil resolutely.

“ Yes ; you would do it, though certain that it would cause your death,” observed Helen, looking at her with mingled wonder and admiration. “ I do not pretend to understand

you ; but I am sure I could love you much if you would let me."

"Do love me then," replied Cecil with a look and tone that might almost have elicited some spark of affection from a mummy ; "and believe that there is nothing to understand."

"The first is already accomplished ; and if I cannot promise the last, I will at least not pain you with questions and remarks," whispered Helen softly, so softly that even Edward, who had generally a quick ear for her words, could not catch the sentence.

"Thank you:" said Cecil with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Where is Miss Clare?" demanded Sir Thomas Willerton of Fitz Elwyn, as he was sitting in a quiet corner with Lady Barbara Hetherton, who had dismissed her second partner rather suddenly, and declined accepting a third.

"I do not know. Why do you apply to me?" replied Fitz Elwyn colouring slightly.

"You had better ask Mr. Fleetwood with whom I saw her dancing merrily not many minutes since."

"She dances merrily with every one," replied Sir Thomas a little pettishly. "Fleetwood does not know where she is, for I have just heard Miss Ashton ask him; and I am afraid she is ill, for she has changed colour several times to-day, just as she did at that Isle of Wight party, which so knocked her up."

"We will seek her," said Fitz Elwyn, throwing a hurried glance round the room, and then making his way through the waltzers towards the outer apartment, accompanied by his friend.

"Oh! here you are, Miss Clare. Fitz Elwyn and I have been seeking you every where, fearing that the heat might have overcome you; but that brilliant bloom puts my fears to shame," exclaimed Sir Thomas, encountering Cecil with Edward and Miss Wilder as they were returning to the ball-room.

"Notwithstanding that bloom, and the effect of the heat of which you speak, I have coaxed Miss Clare to be prudent and return home immediately, as she is suffering much from fatigue," replied Helen Wilder, understanding with feminine tact that Cecil would not quarrel with her for playing spokeswoman.

"I am very sorry," began the baronet.

"You ought to be very glad, that I have sufficient prudence to follow good advice, and know when I have had gaiety enough," said Cecil, interrupting his regrets and protestations.

"I never doubted your possessing all the cardinal virtues; but I hoped you could bear more than when we first met at Alum Bay."

"I hope I can bear much more, Sir Thomas, but one must not put one's strength to too severe a trial."

"And this has been a trying day for you," observed Robert Ashton, who had joined the party unperceived.

"Yes; archery and dancing are not to be

enjoyed without some penalty, as even I can tell, who am in such strong health," interposed Helen Wilder. "So, if you please, let us pass on to tell Mrs. Ashton of our arrangements."

Mrs. Ashton wondered and regretted: offered to go home—then consented to stay, on condition of Cecil's promising to take a certain number of drops—in such a quantity of water—from a certain little phial—standing on a certain shelf in her medicine closet.

Emma being in another part of the room was spared all present anxiety.

"You are sure that it is nothing but fatigue?" enquired Mrs. Ashton for the sixth time, as Cecil was departing, Captain Wilder having announced the carriage to be waiting.

"You are quite certain that it is nothing but fatigue?" repeated Robert with one of those looks from which Cecil always shrank.

"And the heat, and the bustle; you forget how little I am used to crowds and hot rooms,"

she replied with a promptness that satisfied the mother if not the son.

Fitz Elwyn merely bowing as she passed, turned to converse with Lady Barringham; but Sir Thomas Willerton and Mr. Fleetwood attended Cecil to the door, both endeavouring to secure the honor of handing her into the carriage—both expressing their regret at her departure, and their intention of enquiring after her health on the morrow, though her gay replies to their adieux gave them no reason to believe that that health was seriously affected.

The carriage drove off, and Cecil sank back in the corner, undisturbed by any remarks on the new bridge, or the *Pferdknabewasserunger*; and the gentlemen returned to the ball-room.

To Mrs. Ashton's great delight Sir Thomas rejoined her, and danced a second time with Emma; whilst, as if to complete and crown her satisfaction, both her sons danced with Miss Wilder and Miss Knight; and her daugh-

ters were declared to be the prettiest untitled girls in the room. Visions of weddings blessed her sleeping and waking dreams.

Lord Fitz Elwyn danced little, and expressed himself perfectly ready to depart when his friend proposed retiring.

"What a happy day!" cried Sarah as she was waiting for the carriage.

"You have had flattery enough to turn you head, if that can make you happy," remarked Robert sharply.

"And you flirting enough with Miss Power to occasion many comments;" retorted Sarah. "I was congratulated on the chance of having her for a sister-in-law."

"They were simpletons who did so. No man marries the girl he flirts with; take that as a warning, Sarah."

"I doubt the truth of that assertion; men are often led on till honour compels an offer," observed Emma gravely, having remarked with anxiety

her brother's violent flirtation with the coquetish Miss Power.

"I am off! Even Charles the Twelfth of Sweden could not stand two women at once—so young in years—so very old in wisdom and experience," replied Robert sarcastically.

CHAPTER IV.

CECIL having in compliance with Mrs. Ashton's advice consented to take her breakfast in bed, and remain quiet till two, that active lady employed herself in regulating the movements of others; and so persevering was she in her laudable endeavours that by a quarter past one her husband and two eldest sons were on their road to Lindmoor to leave their cards on Lord Fitz Elwyn and Sir Thomas Willerton. Mr. Ashton had said something about writing a

letter, which should have been written a week before :—Robert had protested against such an early call as bearing the appearance of tuft hunting, expressing himself at the same time in no friendly terms towards either the viscount or his friend ; and Edward had declared, with a blush, that Captain Wilder desired to consult him about his bridge ;—but sayings, protestations, and declarations were all in vain ! Mrs. Ashton would have her way ; and her husband and sons were compelled to yield for the sake of peace and quiet.

Early, however, as they were in the field, Sir Thomas Willerton was on foot before them ; and they encountered in the park.

“ We were just coming to call on you and Lord Fitz Elwyn,” said Mr. Ashton. “ Being next neighbours we wish to be on friendly terms.”

“ The viscount, I am sure, will feel as much gratified as myself by this kind visit. Allow me to return with you to Lindmoor,” replied

Sir Thomas with great courtesy of speech, but with looks that said I would much rather go on with you to Ashton Grove. "I was on my way to enquire after Miss Clare; and Fitz Elwyn is out in the woods with the steward; but I will send for him."

"No, Sir Thomas; I cannot permit that, for his lordship must have much to do on his first arrival; nor will we cross your intention of enquiring after Miss Clare, if you will waive ceremony and consider our visit paid," replied Mr. Ashton to the great delight of the baronet, who readily acceded to the proposition.

Edward slipped away down a bye path to Captain Wilder's; but the other three were soon in the drawing-room at Ashton Grove, where Sir Thomas, after many eager enquiries concerning Cecil's health, established himself very much to his own satisfaction by her side, talking to her in his usual gay and animated style of this, and that, and the other; touching on almost every topic under the sun—flitting

about from subject to subject, like a bee or a butterfly from flower to flower ; and yet in all that he said showing that anxiety to please, that delicate *empressement* so flattering to her to whom it is addressed. It was impossible not to be amused by, and interested in the speaker ; and Cecil, who had looked dreadfully ill on his first entrance, was lured into forgetfulness of her headache by his pleasant ‘ talkee, talkee,’ as he himself described it, when declaring his intention of devoting himself to her for the next two hours.

Mr. Fleetwood too kept his whispered promise, and showed equal anxiety for Cecil’s health, though that anxiety was not expressed in such original and amusing terms, he being more steady and less given to hyperbole than the merry baronet.

“ There, Mrs. Ashton ; I told you that I should be of great service to Miss Clare. See how much better she looks !” exclaimed Sir Thomas Willerton as his hostess re-entered the

apartment after giving some orders, which she fancied required her presence in the house-keeper's room. "Half an hour of my conversation is worth a hundred of your drops; nothing like making your patients laugh."

"I cannot deny that Cecil looks better; though I am not sure whether that flush is not fever; and my drops are most excellent."

"High laud to your drops! Mrs. Ashton, which I doubt not are next, if not before the elixir of life; but never call that exquisite bloom the flush of fever. She was a prey to *les vapeurs*, but I banished the blues by telling her how I was quizzing Fitz Elwyn this morning about his turning Benedict; and his railing against the sex consequent thereon. How I should like to see you perform Beatrice to his Benedict! You would act it inimitably, Miss Clare! Could Shakspeare arise from his grave he would declare you to be his original. Shall we perform 'Much ado about nothing?' "

"As you please, Sir Thomas; provided you do not ask me to play Beatrice; she never one of my favourite characters."

"You prefer Miranda," remarked R. quickly.

"Do you indeed? I am so delighted to it! So enraptured to think that my y bears that name?" exclaimed the baronet eyes sparkling with pleasure. "I would might play Ferdinand!"

"Miss Clare, I am sure, has far too delicacy to perform in any play," observed Fleetwood with that unrequired severity which grave men, when not in good hum are apt to rebuke the harmless gaiety others.

"Pooh, pooh! Mr. Fleetwood; you perform a part yourself. We will assign Prospero."

"You had better not, lest he should fo your union with the fair Miranda; and

upon you a double task, with pains and aches besides," cried Robert, highly amused at this cross firing between the rivals.

"The mistress which I serve, quickens what's dead,
And makes my labours pleasures; and she is
Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed;
And he's composed of harshness."

replied Sir Thomas.

"I am not by any means convinced that the flush on Cecil's cheek is not fever, for it varies every moment; now deeper—now paler," said Mrs. Ashton, who had been thinking far more of doctoring the most patient of her patients, than of the possibility of Mr. Fleetwood fancying, as other actors have done before, that the hero of the piece should have been assigned to him. "Let me feel your pulse my love."

"No, no, my dear Mrs. Ashton, I am well, —quite well," answered Cecil, endeavouring, but in vain, to withdraw her hand.

"Well, Cecil! with such a pulse as that?

Why it goes one—two—three—hop!—like a child taking its first dancing lesson; and your cheek has deepened into an absolute crimson. I hope you are not going to have the scarlet fever;—old Granny Figgins, I hear, is laid with it, as well as her son, and little granddaughter; I shall prescribe—”

A general laugh drowned Mrs. Ashton's words; and the prescription was lost, to the great disadvantage of all likely to be attacked with the scarlet fever.

“My dear mother you are enough to frighten a timid patient to death. You stare and make every one else stare at Miss Clare; and when she blushes under the general inspection you predict nothing less than the scarlet fever—even the scarletina will not content you,” exclaimed Robert Ashton, for once coming to Cecil's relief.

“Is that all?” asked Mrs. Ashton, very simply, half disappointed at being cheated of her doctoring.

"Quite enough I think to account for any changes of complexion," replied Cecil gaily.

"It may be so, my dear; but I am not quite satisfied. I shall watch you all day; and by the evening shall be able to tell for a certainty."

"Let me share your watch; there should always be a consultation in difficult cases," said the baronet archly.

"Will you stay and take your dinner with us then?" said his hostess catching his meaning.

"With the greatest pleasure. I was in hopes you would take my hint, which I was ashamed to make more broad, yet half feared you might not understand in spite of the pity you bestowed last night on our bachelor life."

"Ah, yes, you must find it very dull without the earl and countess. And what will

Lord Fitz Elwyn do by himself? I must send and invite him to join you here."

"You are very kind, my dear Mrs. Ashton, but I am afraid—indeed I am certain that your kindness would be vain, as far as regards the viscount, since all my eloquence and the charms of the ladies, set off to the extent of my poor abilities, failed to persuade him to accompany me hither. He had business with the steward in the morning—and business with the steward in the evening; and begged to be no tie on my movements. It was plain that he wished to get rid of me, so I had nothing left, but to play irresistible and win an invitation from you."

"Dear me! I hope he does not inherit the disposition of the late earl, who shut himself up and would see none of his neighbours. That would be shocking in so young a man."

"Not a family malady, I trust, Mrs. Ashton, only a touch of the blues; he has them some

times; and perhaps a little *brouillerie* with Lady Barbara, to judge from his railing at womankind."

"I wonder at that; I am sure I thought her ladyship seemed very gracious."

"So did I; but then a nothing seen by no one else will vex a lover; we are exacting tyrants."

"We—Sir Thomas! then you allow—"

"That I am infinitely obliged to you for inviting me to dinner," interposed the baronet gaily; trying to laugh off his involuntary confession.

Mrs. Ashton had the good sense and delicacy to drop the subject to please the baronet; and then, not to be partial in her favors, extended her dinner invitation to Mr. Fleetwood.

"That woman is like the girl who picked a plateful of delicious strawberries, and then let them fall into the mud. What could she ask him for?" thought the baronet; but Mr. Fleetwood, to his evident regret, was obliged

to fulfil an engagement full four miles off, and soon after took his leave :—

“ With visage nothing kind.”

“ My dear Cecil, you have lost all your bloom ; and are looking as pale as death again,” observed Mrs. Ashton, when Mr. Fleetwood had taken his departure.

“ If you intend to watch me in this way, I really must keep my room,” replied Cecil annoyed at being so commented on.

“ Instead of seclusion, I recommend a stroll in the cool shady shrubberies ; the air will refresh you,” said Sir Thomas, and Emma seconding the proposal she and Cecil went to put on their bonnets.

“ I am not in a humour for talking, Emma, so pray *faites les frais de la conversation*,” whispered Cecil as they approached the drawing-room.

Emma looked a little surprised, but, noting her companion’s heavy eyes, nodded assent.

Robert accompanied them, indulging in his

usual sarcastic strain ; but after a time his restless mood led him to seek amusement elsewhere ; and Charles and Sarah having set off on a scrambling expedition, Emma and Cecil possessed themselves of a cool seat, whilst Sir Thomas, throwing himself at their feet, ran on in his usual rattling style, as if he had not been talking for the last two hours, and would not be expected to talk for some hours longer. A refreshing breeze played among the tangled branches ; and Cecil leaning her aching head against a tree left her companion to answer the baronet's sallies ; and on the plea of the same headache retired early, after satisfying Mrs. Ashton that she was not yet the prey of the scarlet fever.

When Sir Thomas took his leave all were loud in his praise except Robert ; but as Robert rarely praised man, woman, or child, without many qualifying buts, his depreciating comments had no effect on the general opinion.

Prepossessions are usually mutual ; they

were certainly so in the present case; and the baronet seemed to act on the conviction, for he was at Ashton Grove early on the morrow to enquire after Cecil's headache, where he again encountered Mr. Fleetwood, who had brought over a book for Cecil's perusal, criticising its contents with such admirable taste and judgment that Sir Thomas, whilst marking the attention lent to his conversation by Miss Clare, began to think that he might prove a most dangerous rival; and blamed Mrs. Ashton in his heart for over hospitality in again extending to him the invitation to stay dinner, which had been so eagerly accepted by himself.

Both sought to converse with Cecil, and both were obliged to confess to themselves that she received their attentions with perfect self-possession, affording neither a decided triumph over the other. The baronet was the most hopeful; but his jealousy of his rival showed that he did not consider himself secure.

If Mr. Fleetwood could bring books, so

could Sir Thomas Willerton from the extensive library at Lindmoor, which, on learning his wishes, Lord Fitz Elwyn desired him to consider as his own ; and the succeeding day again saw the zealous baronet hastening towards Ashton Grove armed with poetry and history, tours and essays ; with part of which he insisted on loading the viscount, who accompanied him to return Mr. Ashton's visit.

Cecil received the books with many thanks, and conversed with more than her usual gaiety with Sir Thomas, whilst his friend held a quiet talk apart with Mr. Ashton, who thought him quite as courteous and gentlemanly, but not as clear headed as on their first introduction.

Pleading business with a tenant, the necessity of overlooking workmen, and preparing for the reception of his father and mother, who were shortly expected, as an excuse for a brief visit, and declining to dine at Ashton Grove, Lord Fitz Elwyn soon took his departure ; but he went alone, the baronet remaining till long past ten

at night. The next day, and the next he came again ; till he was looked on as a daily visitor, and his coming expected as a thing of course.

Mr. Fleetwood with the same inclination to play the ardent lover had not the same opportunity. Staunton was eight miles from Ash Grove ; and its master being the descendant of one of the oldest county families, young, rich, and single to boot, he had so many pressing friends who would take no denial, that he found it impossible to equal the baronet in the length or frequency of his visits ; still he did what he could ; and if Cecil did not receive him with much warmth as she did the baronet, let her remember which is ever so willing to deceive its friends. He whispered that this frankness was a maidenly manner towards a friend, rather than a favourite wooer. Yet at the same time he would gladly have changed places with his rival, so fastidious and inconsistent are the followers of Cupid.

Sir Thomas Willerton and Mr. Fleetwood

have been here almost every day for the last three weeks," remarked Mrs. Ashton to her husband, who was leaning back in his favorite easy chair with a book in his hand.

"Yes, my dear."

"They would not come so often for nothing," continued Mrs. Ashton, in hopes of eliciting a more compendious reply from her silent mate.

"You ask them—don't you?"

"I only ask them to dine here—but what do they come in the morning for?"

"Because they like it, I suppose."

"Is that all you suppose? If so, you have made little use of your eyes. I tell you they come after Cecil Clare; and a fortunate girl she is to have two such lovers; but I don't know which to favor, as I cannot, for the life of me, tell which she intends to have."

"Perhaps neither, my dear."

"La, Mr. Ashton! now that is just like you who can never come to a decision. As if any sensible girl, situated as she is, would refuse

two such lovers; the only difficulty can be which to select. Sir Thomas is more lively and amusing; but then Mr. Fleetwood is more steady. He has not a title; but his fortune is quite as good, or better than the baronet's—his family older; and should Mr. Pennant die, who they say cannot live long, he would be pretty sure to come in for the county; and perhaps hereafter be made a lord. Which do you think I had better advise her to have?"

"I think you had better let things take their own course, and give no advice, unless consulted. Cecil is able to judge for herself; and may refuse both."

"There, Mr. Ashton; that is just like you again—never will take the trouble to give advice. If I did not look after the children they would get into all sorts of scrapes; and there is no keeping things straight as it is. Cecil, I will say, does exactly as I could wish her; indeed sometimes seems over scrupulous, for she always tries to keep Emma near her, and

prevent a *tête-à-tête* with Sir Thomas, or Mr. Fleetwood, particularly the former. Even when they all walk out together she contrives to have Emma near. I hinted to her that she might as well be out of the way some day to give the baronet an opportunity of proposing; but she coloured up scarlet, poor girl, thinking I intended to blame her; and assured me that Cecil had earnestly begged her to remain. As for Robert, I cannot at all make him out; to be sure I never could. At first he made a point of being present whenever Sir Thomas and young Fleetwood were here, though at the same time he used to say rude things to both; and try to set them together by the ears; and now, though more civil, he never seems to care whether they come or go. Then I cannot persuade him to call on the Wilders, though I tell him that Helen will be offended at his flirting so outrageously with Miss Power; whilst Edward is for ever there; morning, noon, and night, instead of going to Mrs. Praed's, and

strengthening his favor with Miss Knight. How odd it is too that Lord Fitz Elwyn never comes; he has not dined at Ashton Grove once; and the fruit and flowers sent to Cecil are to please Sir Thomas, I suppose, for the viscount seems more inclined to shun than to seek us. I am sure he turned away from me in the woods the other day; yet he is pleasant when obliged to speak, that I admit. I take it he is very proud and shy."

"I doubt his being happy," remarked Mr. Ashton, rather strangely for him, as he generally saw little, and said less of the movements in mind or body of those around him.

"Not happy! Mr. Ashton. Dear me, how can you say such a thing? Is not he young, and handsome, and a viscount? And is not he going to be married to Lady Barbara Hetherton, whose large fortune will enable him to keep up the title?"

"He may be all this yet not happy; Lady Barbara is not much to my taste."

"Now, my dear Mr. Ashton, how can a man be all this, and yet not happy? But that is just like one of your odd fancies. And why don't you like Lady Barbara? I do not think you ever spoke three words to her in your life."

"Perhaps that is the very reason, my dear. Had she begged to be introduced, and flattered me by her condescension, I might have cried her up as perfection."

"I daresay she would had you been a lord, or in possession of an enormous rent-roll."

"That is just my opinion, my dear; and therefore I do not like Lady Barbara Hether-ton."

"Well, to be sure; I do not much like her ladyship myself, though she is handsome; but still I do not see why Lord Fitz Elwyn should be unhappy: he need not marry her I suppose if he does not like it."

"Possibly not; but there are many things in this world that we do not see."

"That is because we do not look about us,

Mr. Ashton. What is the use of eyes and ears if we do not use them ?”

It is probable that Mr. Ashton, who was deep in an interesting work, thought that his lady would have seen, heard, and said enough with one eye, one ear, and half a tongue; but if so, he did not give the idea utterance, and his wife proceeded.

“ Lord and Lady Lindmoor will be down to-morrow; of course, they will be at church on the Sunday, so we must call on the Monday; and depend upon it I will look through them; for I cannot understand why their son should be unhappy.”

“ I do not say that Lord Fitz Elwyn is unhappy, for I really can tell nothing about it; so pray, my dear, do get such a fancy out of your head; and above all do not name it to any one. A young man may have sudden contractions of the brow; and be a little *distract* without being unhappy.”

“ As if I should say a word about it to any

one ! You should know me better, Mr. Ashton. When did I tell any thing that should have been kept secret ? But if that is all the reason you have for thinking his lordship unhappy we need not trouble ourselves about him ; he is in love, and that accounts for every thing."

"Very likely ; I did not think of that."

"No ; you never think of any thing."

"You think enough for us both, my dear ; two such thinkers in a family would never do. At any rate, I agree with you that we need not trouble ourselves about Lord Fitz Elwyn, whether in love or out of love ; happy or unhappy."

"I do not quite know that, my dear. I should like to come at the truth. You never give yourself trouble about any thing, or any body ; and Flinter is much the same. He has got very impertinent of late ; but I suppose it would be of no use to tell you, since you always uphold him. I understand he has the impudence to repeat what I told you once

before, that he intends to live and die in your service ; for that you would not know what to do without him."

" He is pretty correct there ; I do not suppose we shall part in this life."

" It quite provokes me, Mr. Ashton, to hear, a man of sense, as you are, uphold such a bigoted, ignorant person in his impertinence. Would you believe me ! he has never been to see the harrow at Mrs. Praed's ; and all because it is new ; and he will persist in calling Frazer a *furriner*, and abusing the Scotch, because they eat oatmeal porridge, sheep's head, and haggis."

" In all which I think they show a very bad taste," observed Mr. Ashton with one of those quiet smiles, which were at times so provoking to his lady.

" Ah, my dear ! that is because you never tasted any of the dishes properly dressed ; for Lord Glenfillan assured me the other day that they were very delicious as eaten in Scotland.

I was to have taken a lesson from his Scotch cook; but she went away in such a hurry that I could not manage it."

"I am very glad that you did not, my dear."

"There now, that is just like you, Mr. Ashton; you dislike new things nearly as much as your bailiff. I was telling him just now of the new German machine that Captain Wilder is so anxious about;—I mean the one that ploughs, drills, plants, and waters all at once; on which Flinter gave his usual incredulous grunt, and asked if it did not cut, wash, cook, and eat into the bargain? In short, he had the impertinence to tell me that he thought it all a hum."

"Then Flinter and I are pretty much of the same opinion, my dear."

"A parcel of nonsense, Mr. Ashton. As if any one would dare to hoax Captain Wilder, who is so clever in all these things! But I might just as well talk to Flinter as you about

new inventions. Like master—like man,” cried Mrs. Ashton flouncing out of the room.

Mr. Ashton resumed his book on the instant, as if he had never been interrupted; but scarcely had his eye settled on the proper line ere his lady again appeared, and, as it seemed :—

“ Big with the fate of Cato and of Rome.”

Mr. Ashton looking up let his book drop again on his knee in silent endurance; whilst his wife, closing the door, advanced towards him.

“ You are so provoking, Mr. Ashton, never paying heed to what I tell you, that I quite forgot to say I had found you a tenant for Woodside. Lucky for you that there is some one who looks after your interests, as you never trouble yourself about these things. He seems a very agreeable person, and has a great deal to say for himself. I found him there this morning looking over the cottage; and we had a good deal of talk together. He has been

many years in South America; and has promised me some new flowers, and a few grains of a new sort of corn; but I daresay Flinter will not sow them. He liked the cottage very well, and said he would come and settle with you about terms. We talked a long time about farming, and gardening, and our opinions agreed exactly. I almost wonder that he has not been here before this. Ah! here he is, coming across the park. That is lucky; because I can introduce him, and settle all the little things that you never think of."

"And who may this new tenant be, my dear, of whom you so much approve?"

"His name is Lake; and he is just returned from South America, as I told you before. He is not young, and he is not handsome; in fact, he is old, and ugly; but that will not make him a worse tenant."

"Certainly not. Is he a single man? Can he give a satisfactory reference?"

"He has no wife; but a niece is to keep

his house for him; and he will give a reference to his bankers in town, or pay half yearly in advance. He was consulting with me about making great improvements—pulling down the garden wall, that I always wished removed, and putting it further out, which will be a great advantage.”

“And no expense,” remarked her husband drily.

“Expense, Mr. Ashton! And this to me! I am sure I am never an advocate for expense. But there is Mr. Lake ringing at the bell. And bless me! how untidy the room is! All those books about on the table, instead of being put away in their proper places on the shelves; and you have turned up the covering of the easy chair, fidgeting about. It is very odd, my dear, you always sit untidily.”

Mr. Ashton smoothed down the covering of the easy chair, whilst his wife began poking the rebellious books into proper order, in the midst of which task the door opened and

admitted Mr. Lake, old and ugly as he had been described, being literally seamed with the smallpox ; whilst an ill made wig, that came low on his forehead, gave a disagreeable and sinister expression to features, that would not otherwise have been unpleasing, though plain.

Mrs. Ashton received him most graciously, he having won her heart by agreeing with her about the garden wall ; but from her kind and courteous, though generally silent husband, his reception was any thing but friendly, from the moment he had caught a full view of his features and heard his voice.

“ Mrs. Ashton I presume has informed you that the purpose of my visit is to become your tenant for Woodside,” began Mr. Lake, addressing his silent host with an ease and frankness that showed his inclination to be on friendly terms with his landlord.

“ She has, sir ; but I have half changed my mind about letting the cottage,” replied Mr.

Ashton with a coldness bordering on *haute* which surprised and vexed his wife. It was a manner which she had never observed but once before, and then to a person whose dishonorable conduct had rendered him an unfit associate for honorable men, though he was still tolerated by the world in general.

"I think you mistake, my dear; it is Woodside which this gentleman wishes to take—not Woodbine Cottage."

"I understand him perfectly. It is Woodside which I am doubtful of letting;—certainly not at present," replied Mr. Ashton to his wife, without relaxing one whit of his former coldness.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ashton; but I understood from your lady that it was to be let."

"I have changed my intentions, sir."

"A very short time since I am to suppose."

"Not very long ago."

The stranger looked crossed—coloured slight-

ly—paused some moments; and then spoke with more than his former frankness, though it was observable that when speaking he did not look at the person addressed.

“I am very sorry for this change in your views, Mr. Ashton; for to tell the truth, I have set my heart on being your tenant at Woodside. Perhaps you object to me as being a stranger.”

“I do not object to you as being a stranger,” replied Mr. Ashton intentionally, or unintentionally as it seemed, laying a slight emphasis on the last word. Mr. Lake looked up—met the eyes of his host—then looked as suddenly on the floor—pattered about with his foot on the carpet for half a minute; and then resumed the conversation with his former ease.

“I cannot readily give up all hopes of Woodside, so will take no positive refusal to-day. I have an engagement now, which must be kept; but to-morrow at this time, or any other more convenient to you, I will call again,

when I have not a doubt that I shall be able to adduce such arguments as will overcome your objections to receiving me as your tenant."

"I should be sorry to give you needless trouble," began Mr. Ashton.

"No trouble at all, my dear sir;" observed Mr. Lake, interrupting his host and fixing his eye steadily upon him as he spoke. "Positively I will not quit this neighbourhood without seeing you again; and trying what my eloquence can effect. Will you see me alone to-morrow at eleven?"

"Since you will have it so;" replied Mr. Ashton reluctantly.

"Pardon my pertinacity; but my heart, as I said before, is set on renting Woodside. And now—good morning."

"What can you mean by not letting the cottage?" demanded Mrs. Ashton, ere the door had quite closed after the departing visitor, whom his host had not with his usual courtesy attended to the hall.

"Just what I said, that I doubt whether I shall let it at present. Perhaps Reynolds may like to come there this summer."

"The Reynoldses are going to Paris. I do believe you have taken a disgust to this stranger because he is ugly."

"That is a perfectly new accusation, my dear; and by no means a true one," observed Mr. Ashton in a ruffled tone.

"Well, you do not like him at any rate; for I saw you colour and frown the moment he entered; and you spoke as I never heard you speak but once before in my life. It is very odd that we never fancy the same people? Ah! now I see what it is; you think it is not his niece who is to live with him."

"It shall not be if I can help it," exclaimed Mr. Ashton with startling vehemence.

"Bless me, my dear, there is nothing improper in that. What can it matter to you whether a stranger's niece, lives with him, or not?"

"Oh! nothing: any stranger may have a dozen nieces to live with for aught I care—it is nothing to me."

"Yes, but it is something to you, my dear; that is clear enough, for I never saw you look so strange before. You don't think he is a fortune hunter coming after one of the girls do you?"

"Pooh! pooh! my dear; let me read my book in peace. I have been an hour at this one page."

"But really, Mr. Ashton, if you think this, I, as a mother, ought to be made acquainted with the grounds for your suspicion."

"I do not think it, my dear. Your chapter of family troubles has been long enough for one morning, do let me have a little quiet."

"Quiet, Mr. Ashton! that is just like you; as if I ever disturbed you except when your duties as a father, master, or landlord require your interference. As for the piece of road, I have given that up in despair:—but here is Sir

Thomas Willerton coming; and I want to speak to him about persuading Lord Fitz Elwyn to cut down some trees in the Park at Lindmoor that intercept our view. If they were down, or even only some branches cut, we could see for miles. I wonder whether his lordship will do it! I am sure I have asked him to dinner often enough, though he never comes—why I cannot tell;”—and away went Mrs. Ashton to her husband's great relief, to attack Sir Thomas Willerton about the obstruction to her extensive view, who promised to fulfil all her wishes without understanding them; the only part of her discourse that rested on his mind being that some trees in Lindmoor Park, somewhere or nowhere, he did not well know which, prevented her having a peep into another county. Considering this promise sufficient to exonerate him from listening to her long, tiresome details, he made a dash for the drawing-room, where he established himself as usual by Cecil Clare, after paying

his compliments to the rest of the family chanced to be all there except Emma, and his father. But he was not to be so easily quieted by his friendly hostess, who followed him there, and hearing that he was called away on business, she tormented him with a thousand questions and conjectures to his great annoyance, to the equal amusement of her eldest and youngest sons.

"You shall have an abstract of my business and motions, my dear Mrs. Ashton," cried Thomas Willerton at length, finding it impossible to continue his conversation with her, as his hostess was resolved on being answered, and half provoked out of his good humor by her pertinacious questioning. "I set off to-day for an hour's time for my uncle's seat in Staffordshire, in compliance with his wishes, made known to me by a letter received this morning. He is not well, but is in no danger; and having several children, his death, which I should much regret, would bring me no accession of fortune."

I cannot say how long I may be detained in Staffordshire; but you may depend on my returning as soon as possible, and bringing you the receipt for the Saxon pudding as I promised. This is all the information I can give you; so, my dear Miss Clare, do pray let me throw this shawl over your shoulders, and come and show me the flower of which you were talking yesterday."

Cecil looked up in surprise—then, with a blush and a smile, led the way to the garden.

"Humph!" exclaimed Charles, "I smell a rat!"

"And so do I," said his mother.

"There are some ignorant people, who take a mouse for a rat," observed Robert sarcastically.

"There are some people, who think that no one can see but themselves," replied Mrs. Ashton sharply.

"I think it would be quite as well if people

would restrain their attention to the concerns," remarked Edward gravely.

"I daresay you do. How are you likely to succeed at Myrtle Lodge? Will the bridge bear the load you would put upon it?" replied Robert laughing.

It was full half an hour before Cecil and Thomas Willerton returned; and when they did so, both were looking particularly happy, and both had a brighter colour than usual.

"Bless me how late! I must be off directly," exclaimed the baronet, shaking hands round. "Farewell, Miss Clare; you will be in my thoughts I hope till we meet again."

"Doubt it not;" replied Cecil with a smile, which Mr. Fleetwood would have given him credit for.

Mrs. Ashton would accompany Sir Thomas to the door and along part of the road, under the expectation, as it appeared, of hearing something important; but she

nothing except his reiterated assertions of a speedy return. "It might be in a fortnight—it might be sooner—it might be later;—but it should be as soon as he could effect it."

"There is Sir Thomas Willerton gone off into Staffordshire; he would not exactly say for what," was Sarah's salutation to Emma as the latter returned from Mrs. Praed's, where she had spent the morning at that lady's especial request, for the purpose of instructing her in some intricate stitch.

"Where is Cecil?" enquired Emma, quickly.

"Here, dear Emma. Come with me," cried Cecil, drawing her arm within hers, and leading her towards her dressing-room.

"Oh! yes, Cecil can tell you all about it," remarked Sarah ironically, vexed at not being made a confidante.

"Well, my dear Emma; when is Cecil to become Lady Willerton?" asked Mrs. Ashton of her eldest daughter, the first time she found her alone.

“ I do not know—I cannot tell—that is—”

“ You have promised not to reveal the secret,” said Mrs. Ashton, closing the sentence of the blushing, stammering girl. “ Just as you please, I shall not ask another question, though, considering that I have received Cecil as a daughter, she might be more open with me.”

“ Do not blame dear Cecil, mamma ;—there are—”

“ Reasons I daresay, though I do not understand them, Emma ; but then I am getting old and stupid. However this I will say, that Cecil’s conduct hitherto has been most particularly correct ; just what I could wish ; so I will believe that she may have good reasons for her conduct now,” added Mrs. Ashton in better humour, though still a little piqued at the silence maintained by the girls.

“ Good bye ; and all good fortune wait upon you,” said Fitz Elwyn, shaking hands with his friend, whose travelling carriage was waiting at the door.

“Thank you, Fitz; if prosperous, expect me back ere change of moon,” replied Sir Thomas gaily, as he opened the door. “Out on my memory!” he exclaimed, stepping back into the room. “I had nearly forgotten to tell you of the engagement made for you to-morrow. Mrs. Ashton wishes a tree, or a shrub, or something, cut down somewhere, or other, in the park—I don’t know where—to give her a peep into somebody’s woods—or over somebody’s grounds. It is not near the house; and cannot inconvenience you in any way she says.”

“And did she give you no more precise account than that?”

“Oh! yes, a detail as long as the illuminations after a coronation, or the shipping news after a hurricane; but I was thinking of the fair Cecil, instead of attending to her directions. I only know that I promised you should wait on her to-morrow, at eleven, in a humour to do her bidding.”

“I am obliged to you,” replied the viscount.

"I see I have done wrong, Fitz, but I look as if I had ; but I should have promised anything in the world at that moment to get rid of her, so anxious was I for a few minutes private conversation with Miss Clare. That girl is an angel ! I wish you would be a little more civil to her, for my sake."

"Civil to her, Willerton !—When I have been rude ?" enquired the viscount ; and his cheeks rivalling a scarlet *Salvia* near which he was standing.

"I beg your pardon, Fitz ; I am a little out of my head, and doing all kinds of strange things to-day morning. Civil is a wrong term—you must not be rude to a woman ; but I wish you would show an inclination to be friends with her and the family too, for my sake, Fitz. I should be quite happy till you like all at Ashton Court."

"Then I am to understand—" began Elwyn.

"Nothing at present ; and you must not give any hint of that nothing. I could not in

urge my suit, or speak to Mr. Ashton, till I know how I stand with this upstart boy; but I have few fears, and many hopes; so Fitz, be friendly with Cecil and the Ashtons, and send fruit, flowers, and books as usual, for my sake. Once more adieu. I must not begin to talk of her, or I shall never be off."

"Be friendly with Cecil and the Ashtons for his sake!" murmured Fitz Elwyn, catching the sound of the carriage wheels, as it drove from the door. "For his sake!" he repeated, starting up, and unconsciously pacing the room with rapid strides. "Am I such a perfect hypocrite? or is he such an idiot that he cannot see? This is more than I can bear; I must fly the country."

Notwithstanding Willerton's parting injunction, Lord Fitz Elwin did not go to Ashton Grove on the morrow; but Mrs. Ashton received a polite note in which the viscount requested her acceptance of some early peaches, and informed her that his woodman was in at-

tendance ready to fulfil her orders with to the overhanging trees. Some beautiful house flowers accompanied the fruit as for Miss Clare.

"Lord Fitz Elwin is a perfect gentleman exceedingly obliging," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton in high exultation at his flattering note ; "I cannot understand why he never calls," added, in a less elated tone. "They are beautiful flowers, Cecil ; more beautiful even than those that the baronet used to bring, which you always shared so kindly with Eliza. I dare say Sir Thomas begged him to send them."

"I dare say he did," replied Cecil, looking down, with a careless air, the flowers which he had just been so much admiring.

"What have you settled with Mr. Elwin about Woodside ?" asked Mrs. Ashton, entering her husband's study after her view enlivening, or rather view enlonging expedition.

"He is to take possession immediately."

replied Mr. Ashton without looking up from the book, over which he was bending.

“Then it was all nonsense what you said about Mr. Reynolds; and you might as well have let him had it yesterday. I was sure he would make an excellent tenant. When is the lease to be drawn out, and signed? And at whose expense is the garden wall to be moved?”

“We did not settle any thing about that.”

“Not settled about that! Then what did you settle?”

“That he is to come in next Thursday week.”

“Next Thursday week! And the house not properly cleaned—and the furniture not in its place—and the garden not in order—and ever so many things wanting in the kitchen! How could you think of letting him come in so soon?”

“He pressed the point so very much.”

“Very likely; but you ought to have considered—only that is just what you never do. Who is to look over the inventory?”

“I do not know.”

"How many servants does he intend to keep?
And does he retain Betty, as he proposed?"

"I do not know, my dear."

"Not know? Why you know nothing of
Ashton; it really is too bad to throw all this
trouble upon me. There have you been sitting
talking to Mr. Lake for two whole hours this
morning, and yet settled nothing that should
have been settled. I wonder what you are
doing all that time. I daresay talking about
the South Americans, and the Guachos—
the gold mines—and the high thistles—
the alligators—and Dr. Francia, and Bolivar—
and all the rest of them, instead of thinking of
Woodside. You are not fit to let a husband
manage Mr. Ashton."

"I don't think I am, my dear."

"No I don't think you are indeed. Look at
how ill you are looking! your eyes so heavy
and dull; I am sure you have one of your
headaches, my dear; I will go and get you
some of my drops, and then you must

down on the sofa," said Mrs. Ashton, her affectionate anxiety overcoming all her former querulousness.

The drops were brought and administered—the anxious wife shook up the pillows—arranged them as she knew he liked them best beneath his aching head—pressed his hand, after feeling his pulse—darkened the room—and then withdrew on tiptoe, closing the door with noiseless care.

"If she would but be quiet, and not ask so many questions, what an incomparable woman she would be!" thought Mr. Ashton.

CHAPTER V.

THE Earl and Countess of Lindmoor arrived on the day appointed, and with their family appeared at the village church on the succeeding Sunday, as Mrs. Ashton had expected. They were accompanied by a handsome young man, who paid far more attention to the ladies in the Ashton Grove pew, than to the excellent course of Mr. Brockly, whose simple eloquence and fervent zeal, softened by christian love, should have touched the coldest and most

careless. But the young man in question was not the only one, we grieve to say, whose thoughts were turned from heavenly to earthly things. In spite of all her efforts, and she really did try, though not as resolutely as she should, Mrs. Ashton's mind was much occupied in deciding on the merits of the earl and countess, and their handsome visitor, whose eyes were fixed so pertinaciously on Sarah. A swelled face had prevented Emma's attendance; and Cecil's veil was never raised. The bustle caused by the rain prevented Mrs. Ashton from being introduced to the Lindmoor's by Lord Fitz Elwyn after the service, as she had hoped; so she was obliged to defer the acquaintance till the morrow.

"Cecil, my dear, I wish you would put on your things and call with us at Lindmoor, as Emma must not leave the house," said Mrs. Ashton, entering Miss Clare's dressing room, or den, as she gaily called it, where she was

sitting alone with the flowers sent three days before.

“I go out so little, my dear Mrs. Ashton ;—and am only a visitor ;—surely you had better take Sarah,” replied Cecil with a heightened colour.

“As for that, I wish you would go out more. I am sure moping at home will do you no good ; indeed I sometimes doubt whether you do not look worn and worse instead of better and better ; and then as to being a visitor—I had hoped that you considered yourself as one of the family.”

“So I do, my dear Mrs. Ashton. I should be most ungrateful after all your kindness if I did not—that is in all things, but the matter of visiting.”

“I do not see why there should be any exception, Cecil ; and certainly not in the present case, knowing as you do Lord Fitz Elwyn, and Sir Thomas Willerton being his particular friend. Since Emma must not stir

out, your not going might appear a slight to the Lindmoors. I know that you and the viscount are not very good friends, though I cannot tell why; but you will not see him, for he is gone to call on Lady Barbara; and Sarah is so wild and heedless that I do not like to take her on a first visit; she says every thing that comes uppermost. So do put on your things, my dear; for I should be much hurt at your refusing me this request."

There was no help for it; so Cecil assented with a sigh.

The Lindmoors were at home; and Mr. and Mrs. Ashton, Cecil, and Robert were ushered into the countess's morning room where she was sitting with the handsome young man who had so stared at Sarah, and whom she introduced as Captain Hartley, a nephew of the earl's, who joined the party almost immediately.

Lord Lindmoor naturally conversed with Mr. Ashton, whilst the countess entertained,

or rather was entertained by his lady, who after expressing her pleasure at their arrival and the hope that they should prove good neighbours, and see a great deal of each other, offered her services in every possible way in garden, house, or dairy; proving her desire that all should go right at Lindmoor, by finding out that her ladyship's work, a group of flowers in German wool—was wrong; and then calling on Cecil to amend the error.

“It is so very trifling, my dear Mrs. Ashton, that I am sure no one else would remark it, or think of altering it,” replied Cecil, crossing the room at her summons, and taking a seat by her ladyship, which she did not again quit, as Captain Hartley's complimentary strain of conversation, to which she had before been subjected, was by no means congenial to her taste. Robert had marked her disgust; but with his usual perverseness had rather encouraged than checked the flattery of the young *militaire*.

“Thanks for defending my humble endeavours, Miss Clare. I am but a poor worker, not being over fond of the needle,” observed the countess, involuntarily won by the sweetness of Cecil’s voice, and her look of patient suffering; for she had one of her usual tormenting headaches, and was paler even than was her wont.

“A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind! —I am not very fond of the needle myself,” said Cecil, compelling herself to answer gaily.

“Not like work, my dear Cecil. Well, I thought you must be very fond of it; you are always so ready to help me and Emma, and put us right.”

“I should be most ungrateful—most unworthy of your kindness and Emma’s love, if I did not find pleasure in pleasing you,” said Cecil, her eyes glistening as she spoke.

“We do not love you one bit more than you deserve; the house would be quite dull without you; for you are never out of temper—always

ready to help every one—and tolerably lively notwithstanding your delicate health.”

“How could I be otherwise, petted as I am—quite a spoiled child,” replied Cecil, changing the conversation by speaking of some picture that lay on the table, which induced some remarks from Lord Lindmoor, who had hitherto been conversing with Mr. Ashton, though inattentive to what fell from his other guests. Captain Hartley talked with Robert about horses and hunting.—Mrs. Ashton made some more offers of advice and receipts to Lord Lindmoor; and then, in obedience to a hint from her husband, rose to take leave, expressing a hope that she should soon have the pleasure of seeing the whole party at dinner, to which the countess only bowed.

Either Lady Barbara Hetherton had not been at home—or had not proved very bewitching—or the report of the viscount’s ride to Holderness was incorrect; for the departure of the Ashtons was delayed for some moments by the appearance

ance of Lord Fitz Elwyn, who, unconscious of their presence, entered the room just as they were on the point of quitting it.

Mrs. Ashton met him with her usual cordiality, thanking him for sending his woodman, the fruit, &c.—; and he shook hands with Mr. Ashton, and enquired after Cecil's health as he always did; but, though perfectly polite, his manner was more than ever deficient in that friendly warmth, which is the greatest charm of manner.

“Lady Lindmoor is still a very pretty woman; so gentle, and lady-like, and yet so dignified; perhaps a *leetle* too dignified; but then this is only a first visit,” observed Mrs. Ashton on her way home.

No one remarked on her remark; and she continued her criticism.

“His lordship is a fine man too, though not positively handsome:—looks quite the lord, just as an earl should look:—courteous; but a *leetle* stately. I hope he will not stand upon his

101 THE QUEST FOR THE
title, and prove too stately. Being ne-
bours, we should be on very friendly terms.

"If you count on that you will find
have counted without your host,"
Robert with caustic dryness.

"You have taken a dislike to L
Elwyn, Robert; and so are resolved
fault with all the family."

"You have odd fancies, mother,"
replied Robert colouring. "I do not
the viscount perfection, as do you, and
Clare; but I allow him to be a gentleman
young man."

"I am sure, Robert, I never said that
Fitz Elwyn was perfection; he is too
and ceremonious to please me, though
are his only faults; and I cannot imagine
you should bring such an accusation
Cecil, who never speaks to him but with
pelled; and dislikes him as much as you."

"Does she? I was not aware of that."

"To be sure she does. What can you

been about not to see this—you who profess to see every thing? She tolerates him as Sir Thomas Willerton's friend—but that is all."

"Is it?" replied Robert in the same dry tone as before; but his mother, paying no heed to his tone, turned abruptly to Cecil, asking her how she liked Captain Hartley.

"Not at all," replied Cecil as abruptly.

"Dear me. Why he is a very handsome young man; and seemed particularly attentive to you, joining in my hope that the families would see a great deal of each other."

"I do not feel flattered by his attentions; and will readily dispense with them."

"You are too fastidious, Cecil; but there it is;—when a young girl fixes her affections on one particular person, she thinks no other worth looking at, or talking to."

Robert laughed a sarcastic, mischievous laugh; but if Cecil believed that Mrs. Ashton intended the cap for her, she did not fit it on

her own head by any comment or protest
and that lady next attacked her husband.

"You and Lord Lindmoor got on uncommonly well."

"The earl was civil and sensible."

"Yes, yes; I daresay we shall all be intimate soon;—a first visit is always formal."

"Better not begin too warm," replied Mr. Ashton, who, unobserving as he generally supposed to be, coincided with the lady's opinion that the earl and countess were not only dignified and stately; but a little too dignified and stately.

If the Ashtons discussed the Lindmoors discussed the Ashton briar could not say to the rose-leaf scratch!

"A prosy old nobody—a fidgety old man—a sarcastic young puppy—a beauty. Dulness and cutting

steps!" exclaimed Captain Hartley, as
as their guests were out of hearing.

You seem inclined to return some of their
gibes. Criticisms founded on such
acquaintance are rarely just or charita-
observed Lord Lindmoor reprovingly,
ing his nephew's levity, and off hand
of conversation.

justice and charity! who expects these in
ing young *militaire*. But since you put
my defence, good uncle, let us discuss
character singly and :—

'My basnet to a 'prentice cap ;'

be able to defend my position even by
confessions of you and yours. Did not
and Mr. Ashton prosy?"

to: he is a sensible, well informed man ;
slow, but evidently amiable, though
ing in energy."

slow, and wanting in energy! Umph!
mine. There is not a sensible jury in all

England, who would not give a verdict in favor on such evidence. First count against her. Now for his lady. Is not Mrs. Ashton a gossip? I ask you, or my aunt—either of you."

"I have no doubt of her being a very kind-hearted woman; indeed that is part of her conduct to Miss Clare," replied Lindmoor, who always spoke well of her when she could.

"I did not accuse her of being cold or ill-tempered, most gentle aunt; and you cannot deny that she nearly fidgeted your place into a fuss; so there is count the second against her. And now, Fitz Elwyn, is not Mr. Robert a sarcastic puppy?"

"I know very little of him," replied the viscount, who was standing apart looking out of the window. "You know quite as much of him as you desire that is plain enough. If you are foes at heart, let your heads bow to each other as they may. You can say no good of

ere is count the third proved. Now for
young lady—always keep a *bonne bouche*
he last. I appeal to you Fitz Elwyn,
. Is not Miss Clare a proud beauty?
vasion, as to my last question, but simply
or no."

Then I say, no."

I saw no symptom of pride about her;
I deny her claim to beauty," observed
Lindmoor. "I was amazingly disappoint-
er all I have heard of her."

I cannot pretend to say what you expected
most sober uncle; but, depend upon it, if
girl were well, and in good humour, she
d be a splendid creature—fascinating—
stible;—but as it is, with her pride, and
caleness, I am safe; and shall waste no
time in playing the pretty."

If you rail at her pride because she strove
neck your fulsome flattery with a gentle
ontrolling dignity, I must in justice say
her manner towards you was admirable;



just what I should have wished in a daughter of my own. Will you never learn that idle compliments and fulsome flattery are displeasing to women worthy of regard?"

"Thank you for this lecture, my lord; but I have not been so unsuccessful among the fairer sex as to need your lordship's instruction how to obtain their favor. I know what women are."

"Only the least estimable;—the noble and high minded shun your acquaintance," remarked Lady Lindmoor.

"Thank you, aunt, for lecture the second; but I can win hearts enough without your counsel."

"And break them too by your wild courses," observed the earl severely, his present levity recalling the remembrance of his past vice, which had nearly brought his mother to the grave.

"Two lectures I have borne;
A third alas were more than I could bear."

renew till better times," said Captain
Hartley, leaving the room with a heightened
color.

"There is something very interesting about
Clare," observed Lady Lindmoor when
with her husband. "So gentle, and at
the same time so sad, with one of the sweetest voices I
ever heard."

"I fancy any one in delicate health or low
spirits, and you take an interest in them at
once," replied her husband, taking up a book
and showing that he had no desire to continue the
conversation.

When the Lindmoors returned the visit the
next day, they were from home, of which Robert
Hartley had no knowledge, but he could bring no
satisfactory proof of the truth of his assertion.
Lady Lindmoor greatly regretted the circumstance,
and wished to show the earl and countess
her improvements; but, as if to compensate
for the disappointment, Captain Hartley, under
various pretexts, contrived to be nearly as fre-

quent a guest as Sir Thomas Willerton had been. First he met Mrs. Ashton and accompanied her to see her new plan for pruning wall fruit, which, by the way, did not answer in the least: then Charles, who was afflicted with the scarlet fever, and thought all officers must be perfect, and perfectly happy, wanted to talk to him about getting his commission, and accoutrements; and then Sarah, who always liked what Charles liked, and wished what Charles wished, fell in love with a new style of sketching; and Captain Hartley could do no less in return for her mother's civility than instruct her in the said style—sometimes in the house—sometimes out of the house—but always accompanied by Charles; so there could be no impropriety in the proceeding.

Mr. Ashton did not like him; and Robert, Edward, Emma, and Cecil, did not like him; but with Mrs. Ashton and her two youngest children he was a great favorite; and they being the most active members of the family

ally carried all things as they desired, energy overruling the opposition of the indolent members of the household. But Ashton, like our first progenitress—

“ On hospitable thoughts intent.”

not contented that Captain Hartley should be the only inmate of Lindmoor, who sat at the special board; so, in spite of hints and entreaties for delay from her husband and eldest daughter, the Earl and Countess with the Viscount and the Captain were invited to a set dinner on Tuesday after the return visit; and, to her great delight, the Earl and Countess the next day, and the Captain accepted the invi-

and she seen the manner with which the Earl crossed the note on the table, as he said—“ Suppose we must go,” her pleasure would have been a little damped. A first dinner to the best people in the county must be in a first style, and the company composed of first

rate people ; but poor Mrs. Ashton had a
sand *contre-temps* to contend with.

The Baron and his lady—the Baroness—her
his daughter ; and the cousin of the
Marquis, whom she had invited to meet her
from the opposite end of the county, were
engaged ; and the time being so short she was
obliged to put up with the Wilders and
Praed, though she did not owe them a
dinner. Then, horror of horrors, the
keeper fell sick on the preceding day,
she had made the jellies and blancmange,
twisted the ornamental sugar work ;
her former cook, who was settled in the village,
summoned on the instant, terrified by
Ashton's awful fuss, and the honor of giving
a first dinner for an earl, countess, and vicar,
had many misgivings as to the success of her
culinary exertions.

But poor Mrs. Ashton's greatest trouble
temper was the want of sympathy in her
members of her family. Robert laughed

right at her domestic troubles, making a jest of her fears and doubts ; and, as she asserted, rejoicing in the prospect of the Lindmoors having a bad dinner, and stupid evening, and fancying themselves slighted. Edward heard of, but paid no heed to her difficulties ; Mr. Ashton and Emma begged her not to fuss herself for that all would go right, they had no doubt ; and if not, the housekeeper's illness would be sufficient excuse. Charles and Sarah laughed louder than Robert, offering, with the assistance of Captain Hartley, to undertake the sweets ; and even Cecil had some difficulty in repressing a smile, when her fidgety hostess enumerated all her vexations. But if Cecil was inclined to smile, she was still more inclined to assist, though with a heavy heart ; for she anticipated nothing but pain from the party ; and to Mrs. Ashton's great delight—the spoiled child—the proud heiress—the haughty beauty who had never set foot in a kitchen since her childhood, and scarcely knew a gridiron from a

frying-pan—who had breakfasted in china, and dined off plate, now followed the instructions of the housekeeper, and sugar—construct ornamental baskets for the table and eperne with flowers. It was more she accomplished what she took, for her mind was set on her warm-hearted hostess; and the lady who was as much vexed at being a hostess, declared that she could scarcely do it better herself; and that it was a pity that Miss Clare was a lady born.

Captain Hartley was not the only guest; Mr. Fleetwood's visits became more frequent—more lengthy; and he talked to others instead of Cecil the most at rest with him. So open were the feelings that Mrs. Ashton would have put that pie, as Flinter had declared, into all that came within her reach. She told Cecil that Sir Thomas V. had heard of his devotion, and feel joy

maternal hopes interfered to check her
l.

Should Cecil be downright rude to Mr.
Fleetwood, Mr. Fleetwood would come rarely
to the house, for he and Robert were not great
friends, and thus all chance would be lost of
being won by Emma's sweet disposition
and enchanting dimples. Now Emma was
usually by Cecil's side when in the drawing-
room;—many a heart was caught in the re-
verie; and it would be a pity not to help the
best match in the county to an amiable wife.
Besides Miss Clare must be already on her
guard, as she frequently kept in her dressing-
room when he was present, so Mrs. Ashton
did nothing to any but encouraged his visits
with her cordial welcome, and an invitation to
be one of the large party on Tuesday.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOCKS may stop—hearts may cease—but still time goes on, staying or accelerating its pace for none ; no prayers advance its speed, though the sad and the joyful its strokes by seconds of a difference. The important—the awful day arrived with it another *contre-temps*. Mr. Lakeland called early to arrange some further particulars respecting Woodside, Mr. Ashton asked to meet the Lindmoors, thus making le

ready large party, and turning an even number into an odd one, which fretted his wife.

At the appointed time Mrs. Ashton was pressed to receive her guests, looking flushed and fussy ;—her placid husband calm and cool, her children mischievous ; and Cecil leaden-faced and languid, the effect, her hostess feared, of pinning sugar and adorning dishes.

The guests arrived—were duly welcomed ; and then adjourned to the dining-room ; when grew more and more apparent every minute that those assembled, with few exceptions, were no humour to be pleased or pleasing. The Duke and Countess received most graciously the excuses for the dinner, asserting, and with truth, that they were not needed ; and his serenity submitted with exemplary patience to the hostess's hospitable endeavours to kill him with a surfeit ; and her numerous enquiries concerning intended and unintended improvements on his farm and gardens ; woods and lakes ;

houses, and stables ; but there was no token of open, sincere cordiality.

Lady Lindmoor would have been very pleased with her quiet, gentlemanly neighbour Mr. Ashton, who exerted himself to talk more than usual, had she not seen that her lord was out of humour, and as a good wife felt a sympathy in his discomfort.

Mrs. Praed was half vexed because Mr. Ashton had forestalled her and given the dinner to the earl and countess ; and because she fancied that Lady Lindmoor was more than herself.

Captain Wilder was annoyed at being squeezed between Mrs. Ashton, who bestowed all her attentions on her other supporter Lord Lindmoor, and Cecil Clare, who did not comprehend his schemes mechanical, and architectural, though she made a show of attending to them, whilst Mr. Fleetwood, who was Cecil's only neighbour, was vexed at her bestowing so much

seeming attention on the Captain; and vexed at meeting the earl and his son, though it was not unexpected, partly from political motives, and partly from his dislike to the viscount. Mrs. Wilder thought Charles was rude in talking across the table to Captain Hartley; who was grave and more silent than usual, feeling that his uncle's eyes were on him; a change of demeanour displeasing and incomprehensible to Sarah. Charles hated great formal dinner parties where he could not make, or find fun. Robert decided that Miss Knight's conversation was 'stale, flat, and unprofitable'—never considering how little pains he took to induce her to make it otherwise; and Lord Fitz Elwyn, though very attentive to Emma, next whom he sat, and every one else at table, as far as regarded helping the dishes within his reach, seemed as little pleased with Mr. Fleetwood, as Mr. Fleetwood was with him; and even Emma, generally calm and sweet tempered, showed some slight symptom of impatience and anxiety, as if the

viscount had not struck on the topic she most desired to converse ; but where there was Mr. Lake, silent and seeing nothing, but observing all things. He does not know that a silent, observing man is sufficient to mar the success of an arranged and assorted party ? Added to this the thermometer stood very high ; and the heat did not absolutely put them out of countenance, it afforded a legitimate excuse, for were it uncharitable to abuse the weather, for saying their discontent. Edward and Anne alone appeared perfectly contented with themselves and their neighbours. Everybody was most scrupulously polite—too scrupulous, and after a dead pause everybody tried to talk, but trying to talk is the next hard thing to be gay ; and it required no great spirit to predict that the party would be a failure.

The hostess alone appeared for a moment conscious of the painful fact ; but even

began to detect symptoms of weariness in other guests; and to fancy that the earl and countess, though very polite, were a *little*—*little* too stately; and in consequence made an early move; but this was an alteration rather than an amendment to most assembled. Mr. Wilder regained some of his usual good-humour by getting Edward as a hearer; and Lady Lindmoor preferred conversing with Mr. Fleetwood to listening to his lady; but Charles and Captain Hartley stupid; and Robert, who he could in a gentlemanly and natural way, widened the distance between Mr. Fleetwood and Lord Fitz Elwyn; whilst Mr. Lake remained as silent and observing as before. Mr. Wilder did it far better with the ladies. Mr. Wilder and Cecil had headaches; Mrs. Fleetwood kept aloof from the countess, maintaining a lofty air, and giving short answers to Mrs. Fleetwood whenever she addressed her; Miss Fleetwood took a literary turn; and studied a last annual; and Lady Lindmoor apologised

for being very stupid, pleading in excuse having been tired by a long walk in the morning.

"I am very sorry to hear that," began the hostess; "for I know what it is to myself, though I am a capital walker, your ladyship is not I should imagine, from your slight, delicate figure. Do let me persuade your ladyship to take a little snuff, or some of my famous drops; and if you like, take the sofa; or take this arm chair, and I will arrange the cushions for you."

To escape the torment of being attended to, Lady Landmoor acceded to the latter proposition, inwardly resolving never again to own to any ailment in the presence of Mrs. Ashton, who began a lengthy monologue, to the word fatigue, and its consequences.

The chair required a foot stool to be comfortable; but Mrs. Ashton, who had sat sufficiently long in any one seat before, to ascertain its perfections and imperfections,

thought of this; and the countess pre-
silence on the subject to the risk of a
ation on foot stools, as long as her last
ue on fatigue; but Cecil, who had only
ged a courtesy with her ladyship on her
ce, divining her wishes, crossed the
and placed a stool in what she knew
experience to be the most comfortable
n, retiring to her seat on the completion
errand without waiting to be thanked.

at is so like dear Cecil; she is so
tful—so considerate for every body;
larly any one who is in pain or suffering
sort. Would your ladyship believe it?
ade those pretty baskets of macaroons,
un sugar; and dressed all the dessert
owers. Emma and I helped her a little
last; but she did it so much better than
d, that we were quite ashamed of our

deed!" exclaimed the countess in con-
ole surprise. "I thought Miss Clare

had been brought up in quite a different style."

"She never did such a thing before, if that is what your ladyship means. No, poor girl, she was brought up like a princess, with house-keeper, man cook, and crowds of servants; never accustomed to do any thing for herself; and therefore I think so much the more of her making these things, because she saw that I was in a fuss about Hanson's illness. She did it all under Hanson's directions; but still her success is quite wonderful, it being her first attempt; and the attempt was very kind too; but I will say this for Cecil Clare, that painful as must have been the change, I never heard her lament the loss of fortune, unless she wished to aid some one in distress; no nor murmur at any deprivation. From the first moment of entering the house she has given as little trouble as possible; and is always grateful for the smallest attention. It was for the loss of her parents, which she has not got over

yet poor thing, that she mourned, not for the loss of wealth."

"You surprise me, Mrs. Ashton. I had heard —"

"Some nonsense about her being proud and satirical, I suppose," said Mrs. Ashton, closing the sentence, which the countess had left unfinished. "A few young men chose to give her that character, because she showed her contempt for those who sought her for her riches, by refusing to be introduced to them; and I do not blame her for that. I have seen no pride since she has been here, except a very high minded sort of pride, the pride of independence, which would have induced her to go out as governess rather than live, as she falsely imagined, on our bounty. All here love her as a child or sister, and will be truly sorry to part with her."

"But there is no chance of that—is there!"

"We must expect her to marry; she is too much admired to remain single long."

"Perhaps she looks less high than in her prosperous days."

"I doubt her ever having looked high; it was only some disappointed suitors who said so, soured by rejection. She would not have married a prince then if she had not liked him; and she would not do so now, at least so Emma says, who knows more about these things than I do. She never chooses to be jested with about lovers; it is the only subject on which she is apt to be offended."

"I had conceived a very different idea of her," said Lady Lindmeor, scarcely conscious that she was uttering her thoughts aloud.

"I tell your ladyship the simple truth. She still shuns society; but at home, by our quiet fire-side, she is seen as she is, worthy of the best husband that England can produce."

"She seems in delicate health."

"Very much so I am sorry to say; and there are times when I think her looking worse and worse every day; but she will never

that there is much the matter with
and if I remark on her heavy eyes, she
exerts herself to appear gay directly. She
paler than usual to-day, playing house-
r to please me has been too much for her.
Under she does not get better too; for she
most obedient patient, and takes nearly
thing that I prescribe for her."

do not wonder if that is the case,"
t the Countess, with some difficulty
ing a smile.

What is the name of that new pink and
flower, mamma? Mrs. Praed wishes to
," said Sarah, running in from the lawn at
moment; and away went Mrs. Ashton to
its name and history.

I wish I were a fairy, dear Cecil, to touch
with my wand; and make you as well, and
happy as you deserve to be," cried Helen
er, taking a seat by Miss Clare, and look-
kindly into her face.

Do not tell me that you have been wishing

for anything, dear Helen ; for I have been rejoicing that two out of the nineteen persons here assembled were quite happy," answered Cecil, turning the conversation from herself, to the manifest confusion of her companion.

" Oh ! but I do wish for many things ;" said the blushing girl, " First, after the fairy's wand, or perhaps before, that I might use it properly ; I want to understand two or three things that I cannot now comprehend. Will you answer me if I ask ?"

" You had better study Pinnock's Catechisms, or ' Why and Because.' I am a most stupid explainer, and therefore hate explanations," replied Cecil, colouring in her turn.

" You mean to say that I have no right to ask an explanation ; and I can plead no claim but the claim of regard. You shake your head. Well then only one question—May I congratulate you ?"

" On what ? On being one day nearer my grave ? There is nothing else to congratulate

," said Cecil rising abruptly, and leaving
a Wilder shocked at her words.

These sudden bursts of uncontrollable anguish
struck her the more as forming such a contrast
with Cecil's general calmness and self-possession.
She had heard that passionate outbreak,
though Cecil guessed it not; Lady Lindmoor,
Helen Wilder, longed for an explanation
of which she could not comprehend.

It was dusk before Cecil re entered the draw-
room, and then, in compliance with a
request from Mrs. Ashton, she devoted herself
to the entertainment of Mrs. Praed; her gentle
pressure of Helen's hand as she glided past her,
her whispered—"Forgive my brusqueness,
I was in pain at the moment," were the only
remarks made by either on their late conver-
sation.

There were yawning and ennui in the draw-
room—there were yawning and ennui in
the dining-room—and when the gentlemen
received the summons to tea there was but little

change in the state of affairs, save the yawning and ennui were performed in order by the whole *corps âramatique*, instead of performed in two by half the company. The air was cooler certainly, but the guests seemed to grow cooler with the atmosphere. Praed shivered at the draught from a window which had been opened to please the Countess of Lindmoor; and the moths and the long-legs would buzz about the ladies and the candles; but by degrees, thanks to the draught and the *ennui* of being *ennuye*, the prospect of the party grew rather more promising.

Lord Lindmoor and Mrs. Praed sat at whist; Mr. Ashton and Mr. Lake at whist; Mr. Wilder, in restored good humour, played with the agreeable to the countess; Mr. Flounders found a seat by Cecil; the rest of the guests were gathered round the piano; and Mr. Ashton flitted from one to the other questioning and advising.

“Have you heard lately from your

Thomas Willerton?" was one of her
as addressed to Lord Fitz Elwyn.

received a letter to-day, wherein he bids
sent his compliments and best wishes to
Ashton Grove, assuring them that he
return, and put their hospitality again
rest."

is very good; I am sure we miss him
ngly," exclaimed the delighted Mrs.
looking involuntarily at Cecil to mark
received the message.

eyes of the viscount, Mr. Fleetwood,
r. Lake, were all turned in the same
n; and each saw, or fancied he saw,
change a joyous glance with Emma, and
ok on the ground, whilst a beautiful
ayed for an instant round that exqui-
niseled mouth. It was the only smile
d Clare's that day, which had not been
sickly.

ward I daresay Miss Knight would like
e of chess with you, such as she had

when last here. You can sit in that corner, and no one will disturb you; and Robert, you can take his place and sing with Miss Wilder," whispered Mrs. Ashton to her two sons. Both laughed, and one coloured, but Edward did not play chess with Mr. Knight, nor did Robert sing with Miss Wilder.

"Who sings this?" enquired Captain Harley, taking up a song in manuscript that was lying with some others on the piano.

"Cecil," replied Sarah, "I begged her to teach it me the other day; but either I was very stupid, or she an inexpert instructress, for I could make nothing of it; and she seemed unwilling even to lend it me, though she did not absolutely refuse, that I have never asked her for a second lesson."

"It seems pretty," remarked Captain Harley, humming a few bars. "Do get her to sing it."

"I will if I can, but she is so pleasantly engaged," said Sarah, glancing at Cecil and

etwood, who were apparently in earnest
tion.

ver mind that, she can talk to him
time," observed Captain Hartley, who
r no one's pleasure but his own.

ill try to please you," said Sarah, blush-
ly as she received his animated thanks.

! Cecil, do come and sing us one song,"
claimed, speaking sufficiently loud for
le room to hear.

to-night, dear Sarah; my head aches,
m besides rather hoarse."

! but only one song! just this one!"

d Sarah, determined on carrying her
ince Captain Hartley desired it; then,
that Cecil remained unmoved by her
g, she tried the effect of pique. "Come
ne song, Cecil. Don't be fine or ill-
l. It will not keep you five minutes;
en you can finish your conversation with
etwood."

ny other house, or to a stranger, Ceci'

answer would have been a cold refusal, she ever held in grateful remembrance of her obligations to the Ashtons, and this remembrance enabled her to bear with patience the personal impertinence of Sarah, who, with her ill-humour and bad disposition, was often careless in wounding the feelings of others. The hint of her being loath to quit Mr. Fleetwood was cleverly thrown in, and had its effect ; she was though shrinking from the exertion of her voice, and really hoarse and in pain, as she had immediately rose and approached the piano.

"That is a good-natured creature," said Cecil. "There, sit down ; and here is the song which all wish to hear," cried Sarah, placing a manuscript in manuscript before her.

"Any one but that," said Cecil putting her away.

"Oh! but that is the very one which all wish to hear," cried Sarah pertinaciously. "Is not it, Captain Hartley? Is not it, Rose?"

"The very one," replied the former.

the very one;" replied the latter, who, in one of his unamiable moods spoke as he would least please Cecil, though, till the moment, he had not looked at the song.

"Excuse me; that I cannot sing," said he, resolutely, rising to go.

"We will not let you move till you have,"

Sarah making a sign to Robert and John Hartley to join in closing round

"I will thank you to let me pass;" said he, addressing Robert in a commanding tone, but Robert was in a savage mood and would not be turned.

"Excuse me, Miss Clare; we must have a particular song; but I will call Fleetwood to attend you. Fleetwood. Come hither! I want you to persuade Miss Clare to sing—

'Then I'll not love—not I!—not I!'

turn over the leaves for her."

H.

L

"With great pleasure," replied Mr. Wood, approaching with alacrity. "Do let us plead in vain. You know how I delight in your singing," he said, understanding no more than that Cecil, it was supposed, would yield to his desire.

"Pardon me ; I have already peremptorily declined," replied Cecil a little proudly, provoked and annoyed at Robert's ungenial persecution.

"Perhaps Miss Clare has some powerful reason for not singing this particular song at this particular time," observed Captain Hartley, glad of an opportunity of revenging himself for her cold reception of his former flattery.

He was fully avenged. Her cheek turned from white to red, then back from red to white ; whilst her fingers played unconsciously with the leaves of a music book. Her evident distress should have saved her from further persecution, but Captain Hartley was

rous—Robert Ashton often otherwise ; now that the evil mood was on him he did not be moved to pity by her emotion ; at Helen and Emma, who might have aided did not clearly understand the cause of reluctance.

Just in time, Lord Fitz Elwyn," said Bert. "We are pressing Miss Clare to ; but our persuasions have been hitherto in ; were you to exert your influence I no doubt of success. Do try ; we shall feel infinitely obliged by your interference." I do not flatter myself by supposing that possess any influence with Miss Clare ; but joining my voice to the general one can secure compliance, I shall be happy to echo universal request," replied his lordship, a moment's surprise and embarrassment, having been engaged in conversation with another and Mrs. Wilder, like Emma and n, he only comprehended that Cecil was sed to sing.

Cecil was not aware of this;—she had been so long acquainted with the name of the man, that she accused him in her heart of joining in the cabal against her; and was deeply hurt by the belief, and the cold, proud politeness of his manner, which seemed to add in itself to the injury.

“If you do not now comply with our wishes, we shall feel convinced that you have some particular reason for refusing,” repeated Captain Hartley with a provoking sneer.

“I have a particular reason, Captain Hartley,” replied Cecil, roused by his words, and overcoming her emotion by one of those wonderful efforts, which had before excited the admiration of Robert and Helen. “I have a particular reason,” she repeated looking steadily at her persecutors, her voice gaining strength as she proceeded. “That song was sung in happier days—it was a favourite of my father’s;—and now I have no other. The effort will be painful; but since all re-

—require it I might say,”—and her eye, as she spoke, rested for an instant on Lord Fitz Elwyn, whilst there was a marked emphasis on the word all, “that effort shall be made.”

“No, no, dear Cecil. I did not understand this—no one understood it, I am sure,” exclaimed the warm hearted Helen, stepping forward to lead her from the piano. “We ask it no longer:—you shall not sing—you are not equal to it.”

“I will be equal to it,” answered Cecil with the same resolute air with which she had declared her intention of returning to the ball room at the archery meeting. “You will turn the leaves,” she added in a softer tone, and with a look that repaid Miss Wilder for her kindness.

“This is cruel!—it is taxing Cecil above her strength. I had no idea of the truth—do not let her attempt it,” whispered Emma to Helen, as Miss Clare was taking off her gloves.

"It is too late now; she will do it, let her suffer what she may," whispered Helen in reply. "Do not appear to take any particular notice of her, and talk of other things immediately on the conclusion of her task."

The first few chords were struck with a trembling hand: but the voice and finger-gathered power ere they close, and the song was executed with admirable spirit, and not a note out of tune. The hoarseness was too slight to destroy, though it somewhat impaired the usual richness of her tones; and if there was an earnestness approaching to bitterness instead of girlish playfulness in the manner of the singer, this very earnestness might be considered a greater charm by many.

CECIL'S SONG.*

" The rose that opens at morn
Will fade ere set of sun ;
The insect newly born
How soon its race is run !
The sunshine turns to storm—
The night succeeds to day
And lover's vows so warm—
Alas ! how false are they !

Then I'll not love ! not I !—not I !
Then I'll not love not I !
But sport and play
The livelong day,
And mock at vow and sigh

How late in summer's glow,
The joyous earth was drest !
Now chill her robe of snow—
Her ice-bound streams at rest.
No fragrance in the vale—
No music in the bow'r ;
And love, as false and frail,
Lives but one fleeting hour.

Then I'll not love ! not I !—not I !
Then I'll not love not I !
But sport and play
The livelong day,
And mock at vow and sigh.

He has adapted this Song to a charming and stirring melody. It
is by Messrs. Cramer, Addison, and Beale

The task was completed without a note even to the last chord, which was struck by a powerful hand ; and Cecil, leaving her ere its echoes had died away, passed through the lofty air through the wondering group, surrounded the instrument, Captain H. and Robert Ashton involuntarily making way as she approached.

There was a minute of deep silence. Her number had concluded just as the song began with the proud yet passionate earnestness of the singer had rivetted the attention of all in the room. All had owned the power of the music, yet no one thought of uttering a word of praise ; all felt that they could not say as they had said to the earlier performances—

“ A very good song and very well sung,”

yet few could have explained the cause of the feeling.

“ It was very good of you to sing with me, with a headache, my dear Cecil,” remarked

Ashton at length, fearing that she might feel
pained at the silence, yet, for once in her life,
not knowing what to say.

"Your guests would have it so," replied
Cecil coldly.

"Where is the book of prints that came from
Paris, mamma?" asked Emma coming to Cecil's
relief, seeing that her white lip quivered.

Away went Mrs. Ashton to look for the
Parisian prints, and Cecil, turning to Miss
Knight, began conversing with her on a recent
publication.

"That is a capital song, and you sang it
quite *con amore*," remarked Robert with an
affectation of carelessness.

"That last sounds like an Irish bull, consi-
dering the words of the song," replied Cecil
calmly, without shrinking from his penetrating
look, nerved by indignation to endure and
despise the unfeeling taunt.

"For shame, Robert, how can you be so
cruel?" said Emma to her brother, whilst

Helen began talking to Miss Clare about things, taking care to say nothing that required an immediate reply. "You know she has recovered the loss of her parents."

"Nonsense, Emma ; there may be Ephesian Daughters, as well as Ephesian Matrons," replied, endeavouring to conceal a consciousness of his cruelty, by a sneer at its victim.

Meanwhile a change was going on at the card table. Lord Lindmoor and Mrs. Ashton had lost two double rubbers, and the loss had not increased the willingness of either to be pleased, since both piqued themselves on playing a very good game ; they were annoyed at having been so shamefully beaten by quiet Ashton, who never made any claim to skill ; the taciturn stranger, who, as at dinner, hitherto appeared to remark every thing and say nothing. The losers, as is the way with losers, would gladly have laid all the blame on fortune, and railed at luck ; but they could not deny that the stranger had made the most

his good cards, not losing a single trick through carelessness or want of skill.

Captain Wilder took Mr. Lake's place as before agreed, who began a conversation with Lady Lindmoor on indifferent topics, that being the first conversation which he had commenced throughout the evening; and from her he passed on to Mr. Fleetwood, who gave him but brief answers, his mind being set on talking with Cecil, who had thwarted his wishes by remaining with the group that surrounded the piano: she who had been so silent before now taking a decided lead in the discourse. Did she dread being silent? Did she fear to think whilst so many eyes were on her?

A request from Mrs. Ashton to look for something on a distant table separated her at length from her companions, and Mr. Fleetwood was on the point of joining her, when Lord Fitz Elwyn, under the plea of assisting in the search, followed her steps; and Mr. Lake—the provoking, no tact Mr. Lake—ac-

tually took hold of his button to detain him and began a detailed account of the mode of catching quails in South America. Mr. Fleetwood wished his tormentor transformed into one of those said little quails, that he might give practical proof of his having profitted by the minute description.

Cecil heard the steps behind her but did not look up; and Lord Fitz Elwyn bending over the table beside her spoke, and was answered in so low a tone, that no one else could bear.

"I beg you to believe, Miss Clare, that I knew not the name of the song which you were requested to sing, or should never have joined in the request. Your sudden mastery over all emotion alone prevented my interfering to save you from the painful trial."

It was the first time that Fitz Elwyn had voluntarily addressed her throughout the day; in fact, almost the only sentence he had ever addressed to her since their meeting in the Isle of Wight not called for by the duties of

politeness; and Cecil was startled. Her hand shook; but she so held it that its trembling was not seen, as she ventured one hurried glance at the speaker. There was an appearance of self-control—a mingling of pride and some warmer feeling in the expression of his features; and she replied with as steady a voice, and as well maintained a self-control as his own.

“Thank you, my lord, for your consideration; but it is better that I should forget the past; and I hope soon to accomplish so desirable an object.”

“I wish you all possible success,” replied the viscount in a tone that grated harshly on her ear. “Besides Willerton’s public message, I have a private one for you alone,” he added after a short, but embarrassing silence. “He bids me tell you that all proceeds well; and that he hopes to be with you again in a fortnight or three weeks.”

“I am delighted!” exclaimed Cecil with

a burst of joy, her heavy eyes for one moment beaming with the brightness of her young years.

"Willerton is a happy man," remarked Lord Fitz Elwyn with a flushed cheek, and a tone displeasing to his hearer.

"He is a generous and high minded man, a man whose word may be relied on," answered Cecil warmly, with as sudden and as full a flushing.

The approach of Mr. Fleetwood, who dexterously escaped from his detainer, eventually prevented all further comment. Lord Fitz Elwyn moved away with the intention of joining his mother, but was intercepted by Mr. Lake, who if he had appeared in silence before, appeared now as fully engaged in conversation.

The viscount, we are sorry to be constrained to admit it, was in no better temper towards the rest of the party; and most heartily wished that the little ugly old man who detained

he suddenly transported to the top of
a mountain, or any other lofty mountain, so
were sufficiently distant; but he had
ought up with a deference for age, and a
for the feelings of others; and therefore,
of answering briefly, or passing on as
t have done to a younger man, he
o listen with patient attention to the
prosing; but the expected prosing
me. Instead of initiating his hearer
method of catching quails, or making
Mr. Lake discoursed on the different
ments in South America—their contrasts
monies—their merits and demerits—
capabilities of the country; and that in
clear and striking style that Lord Fitz El-
stead of merely listening from politeness
deeply interested, gazing with admira-
well as surprise, at the little, insignifi-
gly old man, who joined to considerable
ity extensive information, and an en-
ed, liberal mind capable of understanding

and appreciating the views of lofty genius. His long residence abroad had left him ignorant of the petty details—the piquant reports of the amusing scandal of English politics; and he was naturally apt to make South America the subject of his discourse; but he was not a prosy, except of intent, for blessed with a keen perception of character, he generally selected subjects suited to his listeners; and on meeting with one capable of comprehending his views, those views were frankly unfolded, and then it was found that he was not provincial—not American—but cosmopolitan. He was quite free from the indolence usually contracted by a long residence in a warm climate, when interested his mind had still sufficient energy to throw off this bodily lassitude, and he then spoke with a force and abruptness which, though unfashionable, and somewhat startling, was calculated to interest his hearers and convince them of his sincerity.

“With mines whose riches are inexhaustible

perhaps inexhaustible—magnificent rivers, flowing through almost boundless tracts of pasture land, covered with the most luxuriant verdure, tangled and clothed with trees and flowers of giant size and witching beauty—yet what is South America with all her striking loveliness? How stands she in the eye of the worldling, the philosopher, and the philanthropist?" exclaimed Mr. Lake, excited to eloquence by the interest of the subject.

"She is a jest and a scorn, when she should be a glory;—a bye word, instead of a noble model;—a mighty genius, wasting its powers upon trifles," replied Fitz Elwyn, catching the spark of enthusiasm from his energetic companion. "She has freed herself from the iron yoke of Spain—she has freed her slaves; but she is still in the bonds of ignorance. She has strength which as yet she knows not how to use—powers which might make her a giant, and yet is she still a dwarf. The short sighted policy of the Spain that taught her to treat

her colonies as step children; to native rulers, and to rule as tyrants enriched for a time the mother country recoiled upon herself. Those colonies still have been outlets for her manufactures of countless wealth—their friends and brethren. How stands their children foes—there commences their mines in strangers' hands. It is well if other nations would take the lesson. A child assured of its mother's care is easily guided—a child sure of a step mother's jealousy is ruled with a rod and if ruled hates."

"This communion of opinion is indeed highly pleasing," observed Mr. L., his little eyes glistening with excitement and delight, as he listened to the animated discourse whose feelings were so near akin to his own.

"Look at their internal dissensions, at their changing governments—if they deserve the name of governments! Their yearly revolutions

at daily revolts show the need and the
of the Spanish yoke," remarked Mr.
wood, who, having been left by Cecil, had
heard the latter part of the conversation
between Mr. Lake and the viscount, as he was
returning back to the piano.

"Whom the flax binds not must the iron gyve."

A poetical excuse for the most outrageous
of tyranny, as you apply the line," replied
Elwyn, "for me, since you will quote
it in politics, I prefer the old Spanish
adage.

"Where we were born," 'tis thus they cry, "though to our King
we owe
homage and the fealty behind his crest to go ;
God's behest our aid he shares, but God did ne'er command,
we should leave our children heirs of an enslaved land."

A poetical excuse for revolution, and all its
errors, as you apply the lines," replied Mr.
Wood, not sorry to attack the viscount,
whom he had never liked. "I am for obeying

the powers that be, and submitting to timate rulers; and the example of the Americans is not likely to convert me to the old fashioned faith of my fathers. What her children gained by throwing off the yoke of the Spainards as you term it, and bloodshed—a depopulated country, corrupt governments—insulted laws—and a country not worth naming.”

“ You forget that she is free; and that the power of being great. Such unhappiness is the corruption of human nature, that it mixes with our good, and freedom in society can only be won through war. As the fabled Phoenix, so with nations; they must arise from the ashes of destruction. A man who risks his life to be free has a lot above the lot of a slave;—the power of his mind may be wasted—obscured by ignorance or carried away by prejudice; but the possibility of better things is there.”

“ Had the South Americans been v

om they would have known how to govern
selves, and submit to their governors.
n boys rebel they deserve chastisement."

When boys receive chastisement, and no
re; stripes, but no learning; and are thus
d in their natural growth of mind—what
have we to expect from such the wisdom
he strength of manhood?"

You mistake me, Lord Fitz Elwyn; I
d only stint people and boys to a proper
ity of wholesome mental food; repletion
wholesome viands will do good to neither.
both learn to obey ere they seek to

Ay, there is the difference between us, Mr.
wood; you would prefer obedient slaves,
I intelligent subjects. You would leave
e rivers unnavigated, lest some should be
n its rapids."

I have no taste for rapid revolutions, if that
at your lordship means."

Nor I, Mr. Fleetwood; and therefore by

timely reform would prevent the chance of a popular outbreak."

"Reform! Oh! certainly, all prudent reform; but I have too high an esteem for the works of my ancestors, to pull them down to appease idle clamour."

"There is a difference between pulling down and repairing—between idle clamour, and the voice of sober, thinking men. The structure of our fathers will crumble beneath the weight of time, if not repaired. Vain to some the warning murmur of the coming tempest; yet, if unheeded, that storm will sweep before it. Had the Spaniards interested transatlantic children in their government, making that government a blessing, and giving those children a fair share in its duties and profits, those children would not have revolted against their tyranny; and if separated by accidental circumstances, the mother and the child would still have been friends."

they had some hardships to complain of Spaniards in their dependence, they neither peace nor prosperity to boast of independence:—internal contests be-
laughter and ruin behind.”

“Give them time, Mr. Fleetwood; give me,” interposed Mr. Lake, who liked to lean on the future glory of the country in which he had so long resided. “The colonists and the people are in a measure trained to government; to the colonists of a despotism government is new, and naturally for its duties sit awkwardly upon them; all will work better for a little use. Their mighty Andes did not rise to its present height in one day, though formed by the laws of one Almighty Being; and the plains of her plains may likewise hereafter attain to grandeur, and eclipse the worn out grandeur of the olden world.”

“Fancy is not a fact, Mr. Lake; nor a turned sentence an argument. I leave

to others the theories of wild geologists, wilder politicians, not being one of the government party."

"You are one of the stand stills then," remarked Fitz Elwyn.

"No, not exactly that;" replied Mr. Fleetwood, who began to be conscious of having put himself out a more ultra tory than he was, from a spirit of opposition to the view.

"Not exactly that; but I would proceed at a sober trot, which I consider to be an Englishman's proper place; whereas you would go at a reckless gallop."

"Only in the field, not in the legislature," said Mr. Fleetwood. "I am certainly not for being a fixture, whilst the current of the times is speeding on, my only use to mark the position of that current; nor would I advance as a leader, but wave the galloping *avant courier* of wish and fancy, which may never arise; but I would that the enlightened should just head the stream."

ic opinion, guiding its course—ruling its
er to good.”

I am rather incredulous as to this mighty
ch of mind, or rather its sudden jump, as
ted by some ; and still more incredulous
its jumping to good ; like the American
er, it may be leaping into a gulf to its own
struction. I have a respect and veneration
he past—its sober habits—its quiet obedi-
.”

The sober habits and quiet obedience of
Norman Barons for instance,” observed
Elwyn with a smile.

Not quite as far back as that, though you
t to venerate those said Norman Barons,
e winners of Magna Charta ; and in truth
was a something picturesque in the feudal
deur of those Barons bold, with their
e of vassals, and gallant knights, that puts
ame the cold, bare, unpoetical utility of
resent day, when trade outvies nobility.”

I admit the picturesqueness of a train of

Barons bold, and allow that those v
days for the painter, and perhaps th
but barbaric pomp and gold are only
to the eye, there needs the touch and
mind to stir the soul ;--such had your
Barons when they wrung a people's rig
the feeble yet despotic John. Commero
a way for knowledge and freedom in th
as in the later times ; and a Cosmo de
was a greater blessing to his country
Malatesta. Not that I have any int
turning merchant, resigning my title
fusing to stand by my order," add
Elwyn with a smile.

" No ; only you consider the ragge
of a radical meeting more picturesque
and tournament."

" More safe, and more honest than a
band on a foray ; and a radical hiss, tho
as melodious, is less alarming than a fro
hern. But I am no comate of those
partisans, who leap at unwise con

because they have not been taught better ; it being one of the many singular anomalies, in this very singular country, that while the mass of the people are called on to exercise political rights, they are discouraged or forbidden to acquire a knowledge of their political duties. I hope this discouragement arises from no covert design to keep voters dependent on masters and landlords. A few years back the cry was—Do not teach the people to read and write, they make better servants without it!—Circumstances have compelled education ; and now the cry is a little changed. ‘ Let them read ; but do not let them read newspapers or politics. How can they judge of such things ? and what have they to do with speeches in Parliament ? ’—If they had not to vote for the makers of those speeches the question would have a different bearing.”

“ Well, the freeholders of this county will soon be called on to vote for a new member in the room of poor Mr. Pennant. The writ is to

be issued immediately ; and one need not conjure to say who will be elected," observed Mrs. Ashton who had been fidgeting about the speakers for the last five minutes, looking knowingly at Mr. Fleetwood, who coughed deeply, and by glancing at the Earl of Lindmoor and his son embarrassed them as much as he.

"The blues, conscious that they can have no chance against such a candidate, do not propose any opposition I understand," added the lady, in a congratulatory tone.

Mr. Fleetwood was silent from not knowing what to say—Lord Lindmoor and his son were the same, because they did not consider themselves called on to speak ; and there was a awful pause broken by Captain Wilde just released by the conclusion of a rubber, seeing the confusion caused by his hosts, determined to lead the conversation as he saw fit, lately led the game to the earl's disadvantage, leaving his opponents no opportunity of putting in card or word.

"Ah! Mrs. Ashton; now you are saying that just to try me, knowing that I am one of the whigs, or blues as you call them; but you shall not obtain one iota of intelligence from me, depend upon it. Only this I will say;—if I should stand for the county, (you need not laugh, far stranger things might come to pass) I shall insist on opening the election ball with you."

"With great pleasure, Captain Wilder. But is there really to be—?"

"And the second quadrille with you, Miss Clare," he continued, interrupting his hostess.

Cecil laughed, as she acknowledged the honor.

"I should make a capital member! What bridges and rail roads we should have! By the bye, Mrs. Ashton, I want to show you a plan of the new machine that I was speaking to you about the other day."

The current of Mrs. Ashton's ideas was turned, and the Captain carried her off in

triumph, to the relief of more than one guest.

The earl's carriage was announced almost immediately after ; and Lord Lindmoor, who had lost two more rubbers, and was dreadfully annoyed, hurried his lady and the rest of the party away, exclaiming as soon as they were off, "Thank goodness it is over."

Mr. Lake instead of again seizing Fleetwood, and instructing him in the defence against the musquitoes, as he had instructed him in the art of attack against quails, attached himself to Cecil, who was thrown into a temporary forgetfulness of fatigue by the trials of the day, by the charm of his conversation ; but Robert's approach during their *tête-à-tête*, he turned his attention to the intruder, and played a pitched game with him at caustic remarks, till the adieus of Fleetwood and the Wilders warned him that it was time to depart.

"That is a very odd man," remarked

Ashton in no laudatory tone. "I took him at first for a good man of business; but he seems little short of a simpleton in such things. He has given up all idea of removing the garden wall, or enlarging the dining-room, though he agreed with me before that these would be such great improvements; and only wants to get in at once, without reading over the inventories, signing the lease, or doing any thing else that should be done, which looks rather suspicious. Perhaps he only wishes to get into the house and then carry off the furniture. I have heard of such things; you had better keep your eye upon him, Mr. Ashton."

"I am not at all afraid, my dear," replied her husband, who looked as much wearied as his guests.

"No, Mr. Ashton; you are never afraid of any thing, and you know how that Gilmore cheated you, and would have cheated you more, if I had not kept a sharp look out. I hope

you have not consented to his taking possession of this week."

"Yes I have, my dear."

"La! Mr. Ashton; that is just like you. You would give the teeth out of your head for any one asked you for them."

"I will not give away yours, my dear; so you need not be alarmed."

"He will prove a swindler you may depend upon it," continued Mrs. Ashton, half provoked and half amused at her husband's answer.

"Nonsense, my dear; I will be sure to prove his honor."

"Ah! Mr. Ashton, that is just like you. You would answer for any body's honor; but I am sure you do not believe that there is a rogue in the world. But it is very odd your sudden fancy for this man, when you had such a dislike to him at first; now I think he does not prove on acquaintance."

"I hope he will, or I shall set fire to W

side to smoke him out; so look to your insurance," observed Robert sharply.

"How do you like him? I saw you talking together," enquired Mr. Ashton of Cecil, just as she was leaving the room.

"Very much; I found him interesting and original."

"It is very odd. I overheard Lord Fitz Elwyn say something of the same sort to his father; but the earl answered contemptuously *chacun à son gout*.' There is something very strange about him; but I will find it out."

"Once upon a time, a giant fished in the sea, and brought up—a winkle!" observed Edward archly.

The giant must have been a simpleton, who did not know how to bait his hook; or he would have fished up something far more valuable," rejoined his mother. "I wonder why Fleetwood looked so red when I spoke of being elected. I will find out that too."

CHAPTER VII.

Two days sufficed to explain why Mr. Wood had looked so red on his probable being alluded to.

As Mrs. Ashton was going forth on her observing, advising, reproofing, and table expeditions, she encountered Lord Moor and his son not more than ten steps from her own door, who announced their intention of calling on Mr. Ashton.

Could it be possible ! The earl did not

them a visit. He had been stately, a *little* too stately at the dinner party, though she had said nothing about it to any one, and the viscount had never shown any inclination for supernumerary calls, yet here were the earl and the viscount coming to see Mr. Ashton, the former more gracious than she had yet seen him, the latter as polite, and perhaps a *little* more cordial than was his wont. Then they really were to be not only near neighbours, but good neighbours. Kind, active Mrs. Ashton was in raptures. She asked most particularly after the countess, the captain, and a lame carriage horse; expressed over and over again her pleasure at seeing her visitors, and finally, ushering them into the drawing-room, went herself to summon her husband and son, leaving Cecil, who was sitting there alone, to entertain her titled guests, which task she performed, after the first flutter of surprise had subsided, with a quiet self-possession that commanded the admiration of both, though Lord Fitz

Elwyn took little or no share in the conversation.

"Good morning, my lord, I am very glad to see you," said Mr. Ashton on entering the hall with his wife, and two eldest sons; and he was pleased, for he liked both the earl and the viscount; but had he anticipated the purpose of their visit he might have wished their coming deferred. "It is very good of you to come and enliven me, on such a dull looking day. I do not know how it is, but I feel more than most people the effects of gloom and sunshine."

"We shall be delighted if our presence can make you forget this disagreeable fog; but I am afraid we deserve no gratitude for so doing," replied Lord Lindmoor with a frank and winning graciousness, yet slightly heightened by his own pleasure. "To tell the truth, Mr. Ashton, I have come to beg a favor; and will receive no praises not our due."

"You deserve my gratitude for such a friendly act as allowing me an opportunity

ing you, my lord; and, if in my power, I will give the favor granted. I merit no thanks for this, having a natural antipathy to saying no."

"This is friendly indeed, Mr. Ashton; far more so than we dared expect."

"I hope not, my lord; I am a quiet, silent man, but no churl. What can I do for you?"

He inquired Mr. Ashton, whilst his wife sat in a great fidget, wondering whether the earl would give him the use of the carriage and horses—a pair from her famous cow—or some cuttings of the earl's famous pear tree;—but it was none of his business.

"Give us what I hope you will have no objection to give, Mr. Ashton—your support. A large body of gentlemen and freeholders have requested my son to stand for the county; and we are come in consequence to solicit the votes of yourself and Mr. Robert Ashton, with permission to canvass your tenants. As our

nearest neighbour we have paid you the compliment of a first application."

"Lord Fitz Elwyn going to stand for county!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton in surprise, which disturbed the viscount's gravity.

Here then was the explanation of Mr. Fleetwood's odd look, and the nearly as odd of the earl and his son on her allusion to the election. It was very provoking that one candidate could be elected, for she would have liked both to come in. Mr. Fleetwood was a more proper person, having a sort of hereditary claim to the office of member; his grandfather, and great-grandfather, having been members before him; but then Fitz Elwyn was a lord—their nearest neighbour, and friend of Sir Thomas Willerton's, who was to marry Cecil. How convenient for Francis! Yes; but then Mr. Fleetwood, she had seen, was to take Emma, since Cecil was engaged. Poor Mrs. Ashton! It was a most distressing

emma : and for once her husband seemed as much perplexed and put out of his way as herself, and like her too, he wished that both the young men could have been members.

A tory by birth, for his father and his father's father had been so before him, his vote would have belonged of right to Mr. Fleetwood. Merely on that account, had it not also been confirmed by that gentleman's high character for sense and honor ; but if Mr. Ashton's natural indolence and disinclination to all change kept him in the political faith of his ancestors, that very indolence prevented his putting his faith in active practice ; in short, he was a quiet man, the very antipodes of an eager politician, contented to let the world wag on its own way, provided that way did not compel him to any extra exertion. As a tory—a person well fitted for a county member ; and the son of an old friend he would naturally have given his vote to Mr. Fleetwood ; but then, somehow or other, it was very odd, but just like him his

wife would have said, he had taken a great fancy to Lord Fitz Elwyn—entertained a high opinion of his talents and principles ; and had a great objection to saying—no, as he had told the earl.

It was very provoking. He wished that he had no vote ; but the wish was vain ; and the earl and his son were waiting for his answer, whilst these thoughts were passing through his mind. And what could he say ? Could all these feelings have been fairly explained to the young candidate, both he and his father must have felt more flattered by his regret, than hurt at his refusal, his regret being personal, his refusal merely political ; but Mr. Ashton was a man of few words, and hated explanations ; he had already said far more than he was in the habit of saying to his visitors, and his powers of speech were nearly exhausted ; besides he was embarrassed, and his speech was naturally on such occasions less clear, and more concise.

“ I am very sorry, my lord ; I have a high

esteem for Lord Fitz Elwyn—and under other circumstances—but Mr. Fleetwood is the son of an old friend. I had no idea of your lordship's standing—in short—”

“ You are naturally anxious for the success of your old friend, and pledged to give him your vote,” said Lord Fitz Elwyn, closing the sentence.

“ Yes, that is it precisely,” stammered poor Mr. Ashton, still looking red and perplexed, though somewhat relieved by the viscount's ready comprehension and courteous manner.

“ I will not weary you by entering into a detail of my principles, of which I believe you already understand sufficient to know that we differ but little, though you are called a tory, and I a whig; nor shall I of course attempt to alter your resolution; but content myself with regretting that I cannot have the honor of your support,” observed Lord Fitz Elwyn with a manner as courteous as before, wishing to pre-

vent all reply from his father, who was growing more stately every moment. "You will not trust object to, or think me impertinent in visiting your tenants; we agreed in condoning coercion the other day. I will spare you the trouble of saying—no, since he votes with his father I presume," he added with a slight inclination of the head towards Robert.

"Pray visit whom you will on my estate, my lord; I never attempt to coerce my tenants or children on these subjects, leaving them the freedom which I claim for myself; but Robert, who has always been a whig, will I doubt not have pleasure in giving you his vote," replied Mr. Ashton much relieved.

"Excuse me, my lord; I must vote for my friend Fleetwood," said Robert quickly.

"Bless me, Robert! why you were never a Tory before; some people even called you a radical," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, who had the most inconvenient habit of remembering

very things which her friends most wished forgotten, and thought by thus splitting the family votes to please both candidates.

"I have grown older, and seen my folly," replied her son with a face as red as the dining room curtains.

"May your wisdom ever increase with your years!" observed Lord Lindmoor with a kindling cheek and a touch of irony, for Robert's manner had been most uncourteous.

"I have no vote, Lord Fitz Elwyn, I wish I had; but I have good wishes, health, and strength, and Captain Wilder has promised to make me one of his aides-de-camp, if you will accept my services," said the usually quiet Edward, coming forward with friendly warmth as the Earl of Lindmoor rose to take his leave, offended at Robert's *brusquerie*.

"With many thanks," replied the viscount, taking his hand as frankly as it was offered.

"Pray do not go yet, my lord; you are not rested. Let me offer you some refreshment,"

cried Mrs. Ashton, who had overcome surprise at Robert's change of political opinions, and recovered the use of her tongue. "I am very sorry about this nasty election; I had no idea that the viscount was going to stand, but I hope this will make no difference in your lordship's feelings towards the family."

"Not in the least," replied the earl, and he rose loftily, without resuming his seat.

"Well, that is very kind of your lordship to say so; I am sure I should be very sorry if you did; it would be so unpleasant not to be on friendly terms with one's next neighbours; but I see Mr. Fleetwood is the son of such a good old friend; and Mr. Ashton has always been on good terms with the purples. It is very unlucky; I wish there had been no election, or that Mr. Ashton had had two votes."

"You are very good," observed the earl, only anxious to repress her volubility.

"But do pray take some refreshment, my lord; I will ring the bell immediately."

Thank you, Mrs. Ashton, but you really excuse us; we have no time for refreshment—not a minute to spare, good morning—good morning, ladies;" said the earl with a courteous bow, bowing himself out of the room and away from Mrs. Ashton's regrets.

I am exceedingly sorry at not being able to give you my vote," said Mr. Ashton as he pressed his hand to Lord Fitz Elwyn.

Believe you, sir, and regret the result of this election far more than yourself," replied the earl as he shook hands with his host. "Good morning, Miss Clare."

Her answering good morning was half-heard; and she did not look up.

I shall meet you at Captain Wilder's in half an hour," said Edward as Lord Fitz Elwyn, exchanging a stiff bow with Robert, was leaving the room.

This is an ominous beginning; I fear we shall make but bad canvassers," remarked Lord

Lindmoor to his son as they walk horses up a hill.

"It was the first allusion to their Ashton Grove.

I am sorry, sir, that you went at suasion; but I esteem Mr. Ashton thought our application a mark of Willerton begged me to be civil to the replied his son, bending down to adjust stirrups.

"There are some there who deserve civility at your hands; but let that pass must have wonderful command over herself she could never meet you as she does such perfect self-possession, assuming of dignity as if she were the injured person. However I am glad that it is as it is—and should be the same."

The sudden appearance of Captain Harcourt on an abrupt turn in the road would have checked a reply had Lord Fitz Ekwyn intended one.

"How do you get on in your canvassing?"

was his question as he came within hearing. "How many votes did you get at Ashton Grove?"

"None. Mr. Ashton votes for his friend's son—Mr. Robert Ashton for his own friend, Mr. Fleetwood," replied Lord Lindmoor in a tone which at once revealed his feelings to his reckless nephew.

"Very good that! Mr. Ashton's grandfather voted for Mr. Fleetwood's grandfather, so Mr. Ashton must do the like by the grandson. Mr. Robert Ashton has an especial antipathy towards Lord Fitz Elwyn, so votes for Mr. Fleetwood, for whom he has only a minor hatred. I suppose you strutted into the house, and said—Please give me your votes; and when those said gentlemen answered 'no,' you strutted out again in proper lordly style. Ah, cousin mine! you will never be member for the independent county of —— at that rate."

"Why should Mr. Robert Ashton have an

especial antipathy to Fitz Elwyn?" enquired the earl.

"I am not called on to account for the antipathies of Mr. Robert Ashton: I should soon undertake to account for the capriciousness of Lady Barbara Hetherton, and all her peevish dogs. Perhaps he thinks Fitz Elwyn has a fancy for the same bone which he desires for himself. But you and my cousin are far more statesely for canvassers. Give me a list of the voters, who have pretty wives and daughters, and I will ensure you the votes of their husbands and fathers."

"Thank you; I prefer more sober canvassers; you have already turned the heads of half the girls in the village, and I have heard some things hinted which it would deeply grieve my sister to hear. I hope you are not playing the fool with Miss Sarah Ashton, with whom I understand you are constantly walking," replied Lord Lindmoor gravely, displeased at the nephew's levity.

"If girls will be silly, why should I be blamed for it? Since you refuse my offer of canvassing, I wish you good morning, for I shall not make such an offer twice."

"I trust not to me," replied the earl with increasing severity.

"You may depend on that, 'most potent, grave and reverend signor;' and so once more good morning;" and putting spurs to his horse, the young man dashed down the hill, muttering as he went.—"Prosy, pragmatical fellow! I shall walk with Miss Sarah Ashton as much as I please, for she is a monstrous fine girl; and not too sensible to be fooled with."

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah! Fleetwood for ever!" cried Robert Ashton, standing with an air of insolent triumph before Cecil, who was bending over her drawing.

Her only reply was a look which made the blood rush up even to the roots of his hair.

"Take care how you provoke me," he muttered between his teeth as he left the room.

"Is there any chance of his succeeding?" questioned Cecil, as Edward entered to tell her she had any message to Helen Wilder.

"A very good chance; it will be a hazardous one at any rate. But which do you mean, Lord Fitz Elwyn or Fleetwood?"

"Lord Fitz Elwyn," replied Cecil rubbing her forehead with great activity.

"Then we mean the same: I will do my best for him. By the bye, I saw you had some ribbon exactly the right colour the other day—could not you spare me a piece for a button hole?"

"Yes," cried Cecil, running off to bring it.

"Thank you; now I look very smart. I shall tell Fitz Elwyn who placed his coat on my coat, and who wishes him all possible and impossible success."

"No, no;" cried Cecil crimsoning to the very tips of her fingers.

"Why not? You do wish him success, don't you?"

"Yes; you know my father was a whig; but—but ladies have nothing to do with politics; and their names should not be mentioned in connection with such subjects; so I must particularly beg you not to say who gave you the ribbon."

"Beg me particularly not to say who gave the ribbon! Umph! And yet Fitz Elwyn is Willerton's most intimate friend. There is something in this beyond my comprehension; however I always do what you wish, so trust to my silence, Cecil. But you women are strange creatures—there is no understanding you."

"Ask Helen Wilder to explain the caprices of her sex."

"I will send her to pay off your impertinence," answered Edward colouring in his turn.

This was a day of high honor to Ashton Grove. Two would-be county members coming to solicit the votes of the gentlemen; and the good wishes of the ladies!

"I have not a minute to spare; but not deny myself the pleasure of hearing wish me 'good speed,'" exclaimed Mr. wood, entering the drawing-room about hours after the visit of his rival; and to great delight finding Cecil alone. "I just left Mr. and Mrs. Ashton in the park am waiting for Robert, who has offered services in canvassing. I have little doubt of triumphing over Fitz Elwyn, but am anxious that the bustle of a contested election may necessity keep me so much away from Ash Grove, where my heart ever is, let my body where it may."

Cecil said nothing in reply to this gallantry but continued sketching some flowers which stood before her in a glass, forming a group which served as a screen for Mrs. Ashton.

"You are pale this morning, Miss C. very pale;—I hope—I trust you are ill."

"Oh! no thank you; quite well," re-

Cecil, looking any thing but pale as she turned from his earnest gaze.

"You are silent as to my hopes of becoming our representative. Will you not wish me success? Your wishes would ensure it."

"Pardon me, Mr. Fleetwood; but my father was a whig, and I find it is the fashion of the County of——for politics to be hereditary," answered Cecil coldly.

"You do not mean to say, Miss Clare, that you would rather my rival should succeed? Do not say that! If we have not absolutely conversed on politics we have touched on topics verging on them; and I flatter myself that you approve of my principles. Do not hold me resolutely to your father's opinions; the aspect of affairs is ever changing, and I might be able to adduce reasons which——"

"Adduce reasons to a lady in politics, Fleetwood! Was ever such a work of supererogation?" exclaimed Robert Ashton, appearing at the moment, booted and spurred, ready for a manvassing ride. "Don't you know that

women's politics are always founded on affections?"

"Then must I be still more anxious to win you over to my opinions," whispered Mr. Fleetwood, as Robert was compelled to answer a message delivered just at that very instant.

"I remain true to my father's principles and faith," replied Miss Clare splashing up her colours together into most admired confusion.

Her words gave no hope; but her assurance reassured him, to a lover resolved to be true to what he wished.

"I will not think it;—you must—you must rejoice in my success; and as a token of my triumph and ensign of victory, you will give me this ribbon of my own colour, charmed by your beauty. Believe that it shall be treasured near my heart till I come to claim your congratulations," exclaimed Mr. Fleetwood, taking from the spray of the *Delphinium Grandiflorum* the vase before her, whose bright purple was the county badge of his party.

Cecil half put out her hand to stay

he would have spoken, but Robert was before her with his keen, searching, threatening look ; and the hand sank by her side, and the words died on her lips, whilst Fleetwood, gathering hope and boldness from her silence and growing confusion, placed the flower in his bosom.

"Mount and away, Fleetwood ! This is no time for dallying with fair ladies, and suing to wear their colours," cried Robert impatiently, hurrying away his friend before he could say more.

Friend ! Was he his friend ?

As the door closed behind them the brush fell from Cecil's hand, and she sank back half fainting in her chair.

It was strange ! both parties now wore her colours, by her will, or against her will ;—yet both could not win the prize. Which had her hopes ? She covered her face with her hands to conceal her burning blushes, as she thought of Robert Ashton's look—his words ;—' a woman's politics are founded on her affections ?'

CHAPTER VIII.

As Lord Lindmoor was sitting with his wife in the countess's morning-room about nine o'clock in the evening of the second day after his canvassing visit to the Ashtons, conversing about the coming election, a servant entered to announce that Mr. Lake was at the door, and requested the pleasure of a few minutes conversation with his lordship.

"Give my compliments ; and say that I am particularly engaged," replied the earl, looking impatiently with a wordless expression of annoyance.

“ Had not I better see him, sir? There must be some reason for a visit at this hour,” interposed Fitz Elwyn with whom, as we have before said, Mr. Lake was a favorite.

“ But I want you to run over this list of freeholders with me ; and there are some letters to write, and arrangements to make for to-morrow,” observed his father still more impatiently. Besides, I am tired to death. By the bye, Mr. Lake cannot have a vote,” he added with sudden energy.

“ No sir, impossible. But do let me go ?” pleaded the viscount.

“ No, no, Fitz Elwyn ; better have him here, you are far too courteous and pleasing a host to be blessed with short visits ; and we really have a great deal to do. Beg Mr. Lake to walk in,” he added speaking aloud to the servant.

“ I begin to feel myself quite a nonentity, not having a vote,” remarked Lady Lindmoor with a smile.

"My dear mother!" said her son reverently, taking her hand.

"Do you coax others as prettily as me, Frederick?" questioned the fond mother, looking up in his face with swimming eyes.

"He plays with all the children, and wins the mothers, who are as doting as Mary though not as reasonable in their conduct," replied the earl, his voice losing its tone of moderation as he addressed his wife; but recovering it as he observed;—"This tiresome man! What can he want? I detest the man with that sinister look."

There was time for no more, the man with the sinister look was already at the door, and the earl, assuming a double portion of his usual dignity, which had been somewhat ruffled by this untimely visit, advanced to greet him.

"I hope you are well, Mr. Lake. Please be seated. We have been out canvassing all day, and are most heartily tired, and long-

bed ; but if there is any thing that we can do for you—" the earl paused.

" You will do it directly, that you may get quit of me," said Mr. Lake concluding the sentence as he took the offered seat, after bowing to the countess, and shaking hands with Fitz Elwyn, whilst mischief twinkled in his little bright eyes to the evident discomfiture of his host. " I understand it all, my lord. You think my coming a great bore.— You wish I had remained in South America ; and would ship me across the Atlantic by the next tide if you could ; but your hopes are vain, my lord ; you will not get rid of me as early as you desire. I shall remain your guest and neighbour longer than you imagine ; and a welcome guest and neighbour too, I trust."

" Doubtless," stammered the perplexed earl, utterly confounded at this singular address from this singular person, who seemed to set at defiance all his host's commanding dignity ;

conscious of his dislike without being overtaken by it.

Fitz Elwyn and the countess looked at each other unable to suppress a smile, which was not unobserved by their original visitor. He smiled in return as he proceeded.

"It is so long since I left England that I have almost forgotten English etiquette. I had I stood upon form, as your lordship has done, into the county a week before me, I suppose I should have waited for you to leave your house at Woodside, and in due time returned to pay a visit between two and five in the afternoon, instead of nine at night."

"Such is the general custom in England," observed the earl with as lofty an air as his growing vexation would permit.

"Ay, my lord, custom is a despot. I am ruled by it myself some times ; at other times I revolt and follow my own will. If one cannot show originality in science or poetry one must be contented to exercise it on lower things."

I have a glimmering suspicion that, had I waited for your lordship to call, I might have waited from Midsummer to Ladyday."

"My time is so completely occupied at present, Mr. Lake, that I can think of nothing but the election," began his lordship still more loftily; "and Lady Lindmoor being in such delicate health, I have not yet decided on extending the circle of my acquaintance."

"And have no inclination to place Mr. Lake within its present limited bounds," observed his visitor, not in the least awed by his lordship's grandeur. "That is just as I said, my lord; had I waited for your calling, I might have waited from Midaummer to Ladyday; so, by a bold step, I intend to place myself on your visiting list at once; and as to the election—that is exactly what I came to converse about."

"Indeed. Perhaps you have some idea of starting in opposition to Lord Fitz Elwyn," remarked his lordship, towering up into greater stateliness.

The little, old, ugly, sinister looking laughed outright at that notion—a hearty laugh, and Lord Fitz Elwyn, despite his efforts to be grave, could not help join in his mirth, it was so natural, so infectious. Even the Earl relaxed somewhat of his stiffness as he heard that happy, hearty laugh, and caught his lady's irrepressible smile.

"My father is much fatigued with a day's exertions in my behalf, and has many important letters to write ; but if you will come with your presence in my study I have no doubt that we shall arrange our respective claims to membership very amicably," observed the viscount anxious to save the earl from further annoyance.

"I shall not forget your kindness," replied Mr. Lake with a touch of feeling, for the viscount's manner was more than courteous ; it was friendly ; "but the earl must bear me a little longer. The wild bee may leave a wearying chase, yet she will take you

ney at last; but I see the Countess is impatient for that honey, so we will choose a lighter road. I am not offended because your lordship had no intention of calling on me; you have two good and sufficient reasons, you will but state them sincerely. First, you do not like me; secondly, I have no vote. Now for the first, I hope to amend that; and for the second, if I have no vote of my own, I have the promise of several from others."

"Have you?" exclaimed the earl, involuntarily glancing at Fitz Elwyn, his eye sparkling with pleasure at the thought of securing an election for his son, the object of his pride and love.

"Yes, I have, my lord; five and twenty good men and true, gained neither by bribery, nor intimidation; but by a fair statement of your son's merits and principles. You must have heard of Mr. Langrish, at the eastern end of the county, who has hitherto refused to vote for himself, or request his tenants to do so. Some

slight service rendered him in youth, no more what, induced him to listen to my persuasion, and with his consent I spoke to his tenants and the villagers round him—only speaking to their mind; there has been no coercion expressed or implied; I condemn—I despise all, who use bribery or threats to influence a man against his conscience, or deprive a freeman of a man's rights; the guilt of perjury is on the souls! Each individual was told that he might vote as he thought just; and out of this I bring you the promises of five and twenty men, set to work as soon as I understood that Lord Fitz Elwyn was to stand, and spared no space; there are their written promises, my lord; they will attend Mr. Langrish to the poll without one shilling expense to you, or to their friends."

"How shall I thank you, Mr. Lake, for your generous kindness to a stranger?" exclaimed Lord Fitz Elwyn in surprise.

"By looking on that stranger as a friend."

unpolished and abrupt, but sincere. I esteem you highly, or I should not have acted as I have done."

The countess looked from their singular visitor to her son, and her glistening eyes spoke the mother's love and gratitude.

The earl was silent for some moments, whilst his gaze was bent on the ground; then, shamed out of his prejudice by this unsought, disinterested kindness, he turned with an extended hand to the little, ugly, old, sinister looking man, his stateliness replaced by the noble frankness of a generous mind.

"I have been unjust in my judgment—uncourteous in my manner, Mr. Lake; and blush for myself. Can you forgive me?"

"No, my lord, I cannot;" replied Mr. Lake, with more than his former abruptness, at the same time shaking the extended hand so heartily, that the earl shrank from his vice-like grasp. "Forgiveness implies some offence, and there was none. I take odd fancies into

my head sometimes ; and it was one of my fancies not to make myself agreeable to the lordship the night we met at Ashton. I marked your manner to the Ashtons, and believed pride to be your predominant passion ; but I did you wrong in so judging ; you are only the alloy of nobler things ; if I was convinced of that I should not be so plain to you. And now tell me how your cause looks, and whether I can be of any further service to you ?”

“ You have already done much—very much—Mr. Lake ; and your high opinion of me, and your frank rebuke to me, are not the things which I feel least grateful. At present my cause looks well ; and yet I cannot but be anxious, sometimes doubting whether I am right in accepting the requisition ; but the requisition was so flattering to Fitz Elwin that I hope a father may be excused for urging his son to accede to it. I conclude you are satisfied of the terms of that requisition. Char-

small but sufficient income for a title with scanty means for its support, since the late lord cut off all in his power, leaving the heir to his earldom only an expensive house and unproductive estates, I could not in prudence and honesty undertake the expenses of a contested election; and yet I sometimes blame myself for allowing the burden to fall on others, though at their own urgent request."

"These are the scruples of an honorable mind, my lord; but they must not be encouraged. No one else would have stood a chance against Mr. Fleetwood; and therefore we, for I count myself one of the requisitionists in heart, and only not in hand, because no freeholder, consider ourselves deeply indebted to your son for consenting to our wishes. That he will do honor to our choice admits not of a doubt; and I say not this as mere compliment, for I am no flatterer, but as an honest man, who is too little of a fashionist to tell a lie; and whose long experience of mankind under all

circumstances enables him to read the characters of those he meets with rarely failing accuracy. As a stranger and no freeholder, I fear my support will carry little weight—my canvassing be of little service; but if I can be of use in any way command me.”

“We are truly grateful for your friendly offers, but, being a stranger, I fear indeed that your canvassing would do us little good.”

“I thought so, and therefore appoint myself Lord Fitz Elwyn’s trumpeter. I shall do better alone than as one of a band, being more skilled in Indian than European warfare. I can win scalps in my own wild way; but I never could be drilled into set order. “Face about!—To the right!”—In such cases, I always mistake and go to the left. Under other circumstances I should not oppose Mr. Fleetwood, though he thinks me a tiresome, prosy, old fellow; and is the unconscious slave of some of the rusty opinions inherited from his grandfather, who never would believe that

the earth moved round the sun; but as he seeks to rival Lord Fitz Elwyn I have told him plainly that I will cross him in all his hopes, and triumph over him on one point at least. But I am forgetting that your lordship is fatigued, and that you have letters to write. Good night; and remember that as this visit was not made according to the rules, or during the hours appointed by etiquette, you are not required to return it. Electioneering friends are always thrown off after the poll is closed; and only taken up again on the issuing of a new writ."

"This is judging me hardly indeed, Mr. Lake," observed his lordship colouring, "and supposing my better qualities mixed with the alloy of ingratitude as well as pride. I may not have time to return your visit before the election, so give us the pleasure, I will not use such a formal word as honor, of your company at my wife's tea table, who like a bride of a

week, instead of a matron of five and twenty years, has been waiting our return."

"You must stay ;—I will not let you depart," said the countess, perceiving that he hesitated. Who could resist the pleading of a grateful mother, and that grateful mother a most interesting woman, in mind and person?

"I yield to no man ; but am your ladyship's willing slave."

"And I am too good a wife not to share my triumph with my husband," replied the countess as she allowed him to hand her to the tea table.

"How have you prospered in your canvassing?" asked Cecil of Edward, chancing to meet him alone in the hall on his return.

"Oh, capitally ! and the more I see of Fitz Elwyn the more I esteem and admire him. He states his principles so honestly, and argues so clearly and yet so gently—making no impracticable promises—using no flattery ; but

persuading through reason, and talking to the poorest person with the feeling that he is a man like himself. I wish I had a hundred votes for his sake."

"You have lost the colour that I gave you, recreant knight!" said Cecil, looking up at the speaker with a brightened eye, that showed no anger.

"No, not lost—only transferred it to one more worthy. Nay, don't be vexed. What could I do? Helen—Miss Wilder had prepared colours for her father and me; and insisted on my giving yours to Lord Fitz Elwyn, who had none."

"Give my ribbon to Lord Fitz Elwyn! And did he take it? Good Heavens! what must he think!" exclaimed poor Cecil pale and trembling.

"He does not know who gave it me, Cecil; so you need not be in such an agitation. And there would be no such great harm if he did."

"He wears my colour—but he does not

know it. And there would be no such great harm if he did," repeated Cecil to herself, as Edward left her, being called away by his mother. Thus were both candidates wearing her favors, though one unknowingly. And had he known, would he have worn it still? It was a singular circumstance. The most finished coquette, wishing to keep the two in her train, could not have managed it more dexterously. And yet she was no coquette; and might be said to have had no option in the bestowal of her favors. It was strange; and that strangeness awakened a superstitious feeling in her mind—the fancy that her future fate would turn on this election.

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah! Fleetwood for ever!" shouted Robert in her ear as she was still meditating on the day's occurrences, unconscious of the oddity of reverieing in the hall.

"What do you mean?" asked Cecil colouring deeply.

"Do you wish to know all that I mean?"

he replied with a strong emphasis on the all.

"I will not trouble you for an explanation," answered Cecil turning away.

"Nay, it is no trouble; or, if it were, I should shrink from nothing to oblige you. Fleetwood has been astonishingly successful in his canvass to-day, which he attributes of course, like a gallant knight, to the influence of the Lady of the Flower. Nothing can give Fitz Elwyn a chance, but the zealous exertions of the Barringham family, who are moving heaven and earth, and perhaps a third place too, to push him high on the poll. Lady Barbara rides about in a dress all blue—a face all smiles—and a tongue all flattery to win votes for her future lord. I wish him joy of an electioneering wife!"

"Lady Barbara has a right openly to espouse his cause," said Cecil to herself; and a pang shot to her heart as she said it; but she made no reply to Robert, and as she left the hall with

a steady step, and her face was from him, he could not tell the effect produced by his words.

"I do not like Captain Hartley's being so much at the house, and wish you would not encourage him, my dear," said Mr. Ashton to his lady, a few days after the dinner given to the Earl and Countess of Lindmoor.

"He will come whether I encourage him or not, being such great friends with Charles; and I am sure I don't ask him as often as I did Sir Thomas Willerton, and you never said any thing about my encouraging him. I don't see why Sarah should not have her chance of a husband as well as others," replied his lady pettishly.

"Sir Thomas Willerton is a totally different person from Captain Hartley. The first is a man of honour and high principle; the last I fear a spendthrift and a libertine."

"La! Mr. Ashton. I am sure I never heard the Captain say any thing improper; and I can't think how you could have got such a fancy into your head."

"Perhaps not, my dear; but it is no mere fancy, so I beg you will discourage his visits; and tell Sarah not to let him accompany her so often in her walks; the neighbours are already making remarks, and I fear the girl's head is turned as it is."

"I don't know what the neighbours can say that we need care about, for Sarah never walks with him without Charles; and a brother is thought a sufficient chaperon any where."

"I fear his companionship for Charles almost as much as for Sarah."

"La, Mr. Ashton! There now that is just like you, speaking so mysteriously. What can you fear for Charles or Sarah? Captain Hartley is an earl's nephew, and a very fine, handsome, young man."

"Without money, and with no principle."

"Who told you that, Mr. Ashton? Flinter—I am sure it was Flinter. He took a perfect hatred to the Captain the first day he saw him, because he laughed at his old fashioned ways."

"It was not Flinter."

"Then it was Mr. Lake, Ah! now I have found it. I wonder who Mr. Lake is, that he should set up for being so much better than other people, and knowing so much more? Where is the niece he talked of? I have seen nothing of her yet. Wanting me to alter my celery beds indeed. What should he know of celery beds living in South America all his life? Then he is always coming here at odd hours, though he declares he has not a moment to spare; and always looking so sharp at every thing and every body, as if he were watching an opportunity to run off with the mustard spoon. I can't think what makes you so fond of him, for you did not like him at first, and would not let him the house; and now you look delighted to see him; and so does Cecil, almost the only person whom she appears glad to meet. She is looking worse and worse every day; I should not wonder if she did not live long; that is unless Sir Thomas Willerton should return directly. And there

is Robert as cross as old Goody Fall who scolds the cat for purring, and the kettle for singing, worrying himself ill to get votes for Mr. Fleetwood, and yet cutting him up all the time, and leaving Edward to play the pretty to Helen Wilder, whilst he is flirting so outrageously with that Miss Power, whom I never will ask to the house, that the whole county is talking of it. He might just as well have voted for Lord Fitz Elwyn as he used to be a whig; and then we should have found the Lindmoors friendly neighbours; and now, notwithstanding all the earl said, I doubt it; for I was only a quarter of a mile from him yesterday, and he turned and rode off in another direction. It is all very vexatious;—and now this about Sarah and Captain Hartley. I should like to know what positive charge that prying Mr. Lake can make against him. I have no idea of losing the chance of such a man for Sarah, without some good reason.”

Mr. Ashton in reply to this long and ram-

bling catalogue of family vexations, contented himself with relating some of the stories against Captain Hartley, and repeating his wish that he might not be encouraged at the house.

Mrs. Ashton heard, but professed not to believe, and favored her husband with a long discourse—the text—scandal—in which he more than hinted his love for gossip, and his contempt for all idle reports; and of the said discourse, according to his usual custom, he did not hear above one sixth. Notwithstanding her professed incredulity, however, Mrs. Ashton had the good sense to caution Sarah, and omit her usual dinner invitation to the Captain.

END OF VOL. II.

Printed by T. C. Newby, Angel Hill, Bury.

THE QUIET HUSBAND.

VOL. III.

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THE
QUIET HUSBAND,

BY

MISS ELLEN PICKERING,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER," "THE PRINCE
AND THE PEDLAR," "NAN DARRELL,"
"THE FRIGHT." &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
QUIET HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

WE are not going to give a detailed account of the canvassing, or the canvassers; the praises bestowed on ugly houses, ugly children, and ugly women—the courtesies showered on the unwashed—the friendship professed for the washed—the arguments employed, too meaningless for refutation—the promises made, too rich for performance;—such things have been related, and ably related before; and if such details skilfully told awaken smiles, those smiles

should be followed by sighs, for such details are painful to the thinking mind, as showing the debasement of man. Alas! that such selfish motives--such degrading arts--such falsehood, tyranny, and deceit should mar what would be else a glorious sight—a freeman choosing a freeman's fitting representative. Let the wealthy look to it! They boast of their superior knowledge and refinement; but it would be better to be ignorant as the untaught savage, if they use their knowledge to deceive and degrade those, who are doomed to toil too hardly for the support of the body to have much leisure for the improvement of the mind. If the rich have greater knowledge and power, they are called to the performance of higher duties. "To whom much is given from them will much be required." The drunkenness—the falsehood—the perjury of elections may be brought against them at the last day. The poor may do these things, but the rich are consenting thereto; nay worse, they are the

tempters;—they give the gold that woos to sin—
—they utter the threats that prevent an honest
vote.

But while we speak of the false courtesies,
unperformable promises, and debasing bribery
by threat or gift practised at the election of a
member for the county of——, we exempt
the two candidates and their immediate friends
from the charges. Lord Fitz Elwyn and Mr.
Fleetwood were too honorable and high minded
to sanction acts, which they considered un-
worthy of their cause and themselves; and
whenever such arts were practised by their
subordinate partisans they were veiled with a
show of decency in deference to the characters
of the leaders, not openly proclaimed and boast-
ed of as had been done at some former elections.

Lord Fitz Elwyn was a whig—Mr. Fleet-
wood a tory;—but neither were violent, nor
bigoted; both were enlightened. Mr. Fleetwood,
venerating the wisdom of his ancestors, feared
to grant what he admitted might be useful

reforms, lest those reforms should be made the stepping stones to dangerous innovations. Lord Fitz Elwyn venerated the wisdom of his forefathers as much as his opponent; but felt convinced that he emulated their wisdom, and proved himself worthy of being their descendant, by adapting the ancient laws and customs to the present times, suiting them to the general advancement of intelligence among the great mass of mankind. Mr. Fleetwood countenanced education without any hope of its increasing the comforts or elevating the thoughts of the lower classes; Lord Fitz Elwyn advocated it with all his eloquence, and advanced it with all his influence, hoping thereby to raise the mental and bodily condition of the labouring orders. Mr. Fleetwood had a well informed mind and steady judgment;—Lord Fitz Elwyn added to these a generous enthusiasm, which made him more ardent in friendship, more earnest in his hopes and exertions.

They were not friends—they never had been

friends ;—a trivial circumstance on their first introduction had rather set them against each other, but they were high minded rivals, carefully courteous in manner when together, carefully courteous in speech when apart, requesting, ordering, and entreating their adherents to pursue the same gentlemanly course.

Whether this rivalry was quite as generous in their inmost hearts as in their open speech and manner—whether it was entirely as they endeavoured to impress on their partisans a rivalry of opinions not of men ; and whether no bitter personal feeling—no consciousness of rivalry elsewhere than in the senate made each more eager for victory, as in the contest for the silver arrow, we ask not—and we tell not ; their words and their acts were worthy commendation, and thoughts are not amenable to human censure, though fairly judged by the Most High. But though the efforts of the candidates and their intimate friends gave to the contest a calmer and more generous charac-

ter than on preceding occasions, still those efforts could not completely repress party dissensions. They and their families declared that no political difference should change their friendly feelings towards their respective neighbours—that, vote as they would, they would count no such voting unneighbourly; and this was meant as well as said; but all must know how in any case, but particularly in moments of political excitement, we naturally become more closely knit to those who are strenuous in the same cause—how involuntarily estranged from those who wish success to our opponents. And why should the election for the county of —— prove an exception to this general rule?

Lord Lindmoor had declared that the voting of Mr. Ashton and his son for Mr. Fleetwood would make no difference in his friendly feelings towards the family, and perhaps the change was very slight, his friendly feelings being far below fever heat; but still some little difference it did make—possibly unknown to himself.

His mind frequently recurred to Robert's ungracious manner—each time with increasing ill will; and by the same process, he acquired such a horror of Mrs. Ashton's fussy endeavours to make every one round her!—"healthy, wealthy, and wise,"—that she was not wrong in supposing he had ridden a mile out of his way to avoid an encounter. Edward grew day by day in his esteem; but every casual meeting with Robert confirmed his dislike, that fitful youth appearing to take pleasure in annoying him and his son. His alienation from the inhabitants of Ashton Grove had not yet been shown in overt acts, his time being too much occupied with the coming election to admit of much neighbourly visiting, but then the feeling was in his mind ready to influence his conduct when called into play by circumstances; and how soon those circumstances might arise no one could tell.

In spite of Mr. Ashton's cautions, Sarah and Captain Hartley were nearly as much together

out of doors as before, though seeing each other within ; and Lord Linden receiving a hint of the fact from a friend (thought Mr. Lake) plainly told his former ward that he would never give consent to a match, which from want of both sides, and want of morals on only entail misery upon all concerned.

“Wait till I ask you, my lord,” the young man’s reply, preventing all comment by leaving the room.

The election, and the idea that Mr. Lake was trying to catch a husband for her who doubtless shared her interest in him, was therefore unworthy of his care, and more public interference at the time he knew that his nephew was too self-indulgent to be taken in—he also knew that Ashton had been warned ; and this was sufficient for the present.

We have already said that we will not enter into a detailed account of the

business of the election ; and shall content ourselves with saying that that business was carried on with the greatest activity on either side. Canvassing parties, wearing both colours, traversed the country in all directions, sometimes meeting with good humour, and parting with a jest—sometimes meeting with a scowl, and parting with an angry word. Edward had taken up his abode almost entirely with the Wilders, only paying an occasional visit at home ; and Robert frequently slept at Mr. Fleetwood's or the neighbouring towns, returning if he returned at all, late at night, wearied and out of temper, though affecting high spirits, and speaking of the success of the tories as certain.

The writ had been issued—the day of nomination fixed for Thursday ; and as Robert was waiting for his horse on the preceding morning he told his mother that, in all probability, she would not see him again till after the election—“ That is, if the whigs should be silly enough to go to the poll ; knowing, as they must, that

they can have no chance," he added looking towards Cecil. "We shall be very busy to-day, and to-morrow I must attend Fleetwood to the hall as my father's representative, since he cannot be induced to go. But remember, sir, you have promised to vote."

"Yes," said Mr. Ashton with a sigh, shrinking from the trouble.

"But what do you do Sunday, Robert? I hope you do not mean to be rampaging all over the country on the Sabbath."

"No, mother mine. We are to go in process, eight hundred strong, with banners and all, to the county cathedral, to prove our veneration for Church and State. It will be a very imposing sight."

"So it will! I should like to drive over and see it. Nelthorpe is only fourteen miles off," observed Mrs. Ashton, who could never resist a sight, and was completely deceived by her son's gravity.

"It is sixteen miles at the very least; and

Robert is only laughing at your taste for raree shows," remarked her husband.

"Then he might be more profitably employed," rejoined Mrs. Ashton with unusual severity.

"So he might, my dear mother; but when was Robert Ashton employed profitably for himself or others?" exclaimed her son with bitterness. "He has a wild bee in his bonnet, that sometimes stings him to madness. Now I think of it, Miss Clare, Fleetwood bade me convince you of his deep regret at being detained from your presence, and add that he should keep a servant ready mounted, and on the final declaration of the state of the poll send you the choicest bouquet that Staunton can furnish, as a token of his success. And you may count on the bouquet, for he is certain of victory."

"I beg Mr. Fleetwood will take no such trouble," replied Cecil coldly, colouring in spite of herself at Robert's announcement,

which was rendered more annoying manner.

"I will report your reply; but, if I will not heed my words," said Ro left the room.

If her sons were busy, riding, carrying messages, and canvassing v Ashton was quite as busy; bustling bustling there;—you might have the Sheriff—Under-Sheriff—the return writ; and all the poll clerks centred on her hands; wondering who would and second the candidates—for v person would vote—and what the would say; warning this voter not to and the other not to get into a row still at home was out of the question she went to the next town, and the villages, leaving those at Ashton settle themselves in quiet to their

their work, if they remained uninfected with the prevailing epidemic—restlessness.

Against such an epidemic, whatever might be said of the others, Mr. Ashton was proof, so he retired with a book to his study, whence, after the lapse of some hours, he issued again at a sober pace, for the purpose of taking his usual walk ; but that walk was not to be solitary, for he had not proceeded far before he was joined by Flinter, who seemed to have been watching for him for the purpose of acquainting him with sundry details touching the farm and park, which he considered it right that master should know. We say acquainting, rather than consulting, as Flinter rarely applied to any one for advice ; and it was one of his greatest merits in the eyes of his indolent master that his bailiff always told him what he had done, instead of asking what he should do ; and taking his silence for consent always repeated to others that master and he had agreed on doing this or that.

"The farmers may grumble as they please—there are some people never satisfied—but for my part, considering all things, I thinks we gets on very well, as I have just been a telling you," continued Flinter, having nearly arrived at the close of the farming commentaries, for however silent to Mrs. Ashton and some others he always found something to say to his master. "Old Colonel is worn out.—I can't say but what he is; and I suppose we must buy that young cart-horse of Farmer Head's; but I won't give his price for it—that's poz; and so I told un. I'll only give what's reasonable; and to set off that, Butcher Grindel is to take the young heifer, the one with the star in her forehead, and not for nothing neither. I ain't *larned*, as Missus says, but I makes the farm pay well; and that is more than some of them can say as writes like parliament men."

"I am very well satisfied with your management," said Mr. Ashton kindly.

“Thank you for saying so, sir. It is a pleasure to be your *bailey* for you never interferes ; and if there comes a bad crop one year, you only hopes for a better the next, knowing that I’d have had it fine weather if I could. Some people are never satisfied, but always prying about here and there, and spying out just what one don’t want them to see ; not but what one should look about one too, only then one should do it in a quiet way, not pressing and bustling every body. Now I maintains as how we quiet ones, as makes no scrimmage, sees more nor them who pokes their noses in every where, and purtends to see every thing. ‘All cry and no wool !’ is the way with some folks ; and to my mind it is just so with Missus ; you and I, sir, sees more than she any day of the week. She is always a looking at the other end of a fallow field, and so never sees the hare in the furrow at her feet.”

Mr. Ashton smiled at the idea, but made no remark ; and Flinter looked disappointed.

Had his master really been the k he believed, he would have seen loquacious bailiff had a something which he did not exactly know to produce.

"Pretty fuss Jack has to drive he remarked after a short silence, drawing Mr. Ashton's attention to some rous porkers, that showed a determination to go every way but the right; squealing, running wrong, or standing still. "They be kittle things to my mind; e'en a'most as kittle as galls."

"What gives you such a bad opinion of young girls?" asked Mr. Ashton of Flinter's comparison.

"What I seea, sir;" replied with solemnity; "not but what the young man is most to blame, only, then, he should take warning from them as I have seen more of the world. I

tell Miss Sarah that he was not fit for her some time ago ; but she only told me to mind my wheat and oats, and not meddle with her. As if I did not love all your children, sir, as though they was my own, and look upon them just the same too. Strange if I did not, and been so many years in the family, boy and man, and my father afore me ; first bailey to your brother, and then to you."

"No one doubts your regard for the family ; but what is this about Miss Sarah ? who is not fit for her ?"

"Why, sir, you see that is just what I wants you to know ; for I don't think you can guess how matters is going on, nor Missus neither exactly, though she believes she do. I means that Captain Hartley ain't fit for her ; and no more he ain't, for I seed him give Lion, our house dog, a cut with his whip, all for nothing ; and a man as will do that will never make a good husband ; and he knows nothing about farming. Besides, that ain't the worst of him,

for his servant, who used to be an honest lad enough when I knowed un as a boy, though I don't think his morals is much mended by being with the Captain, tells dreadful tales of his master's doings; gaming, and drinking, and worse things too, that I could not tell Miss Sarah. It was that which made his poor mother, Lord Lindmoor's sister, so ill and 'most killed her. The earl paid some of his debts; but he has got many more left, and Ralph tells me that he says he can't afford to marry, so he ain't a proper person to keep company with Miss Sarah; and yet they are a walking together every day; sometimes with Master Charles, and sometimes without, according to whether he is out electioneering or not. I am sure, sir, now that you knows of it, you won't let it be."

"I have already spoken to Mrs. Ashton on the subject; and Captain Hartley comes very seldom to the house."

"Perhaps not, sir; but then he does worse,

always walking about the park, and shrubberies waiting for Miss Sarah ; and it is seldom a day that he don't find her. The villagers make disrespectful remarks about it, and he don't mind laughing at the family when she ain't by. I tell you what, sir, there is mischief in the wind—Captain Hartley is going away directly, for Lord Lindmoor has been finding fault with him, and won't ask him to stay any longer ; and if you don't look sharp, sir, he will coax Miss Sarah to go with him."

" Nonsense, Flinter ! I wonder how you can suspect such a thing. Miss Sarah has higher ideas of duty," replied Mr. Ashton with unusual severity.

" It is no nonsense, sir, you may depend on that ; and I warns you again to look sharp. Duty this—and duty that:—it seems to me that duty is pretty much what folks choose to make it now-a-days. People think that old Flinter knows nothing about lovers, and all

that : but he knows more than as time will show," observed touchy bailiff, turning away in warning having been slighted as he went, according to his usual manner.

" You are just the person I wish, Flutter," said Mrs. A. him unluckily before his ill-humour was over.

" Well, ma'am, and what do you want with me ?" enquired Flin of a sudden, for, blinded by his anger, he had nearly walked over his wife, perceiving her, looking more agreeable than ever.

" I want to know what you have done with Purcell's pigs ?"

" Threatened to put them in the pound, ma'am."

" You threatened that long ago, you not done it ?"

“ ’Cause I can’t catch them in the turmits, ma’am.”

“ You don’t keep a sharp look out.”

“ If others kept as sharp a look out about other things—things would go better, ma’am.”

“ I don’t know what you mean by that, Flinter, unless that your master never looks into any thing.”

“ I did not mean nothing at all about master, ma’am.”

“ It does not matter what you mean. But have you been to see the harrow at Mrs. Praeds ?”

“ No, ma’am.”

“ And why don’t you go? I spoke to you about it more than six months ago.”

“ I han’t got time, ma’am.”

“ Not time ! I should like to know what you find to do.”

“ Every body is busy at this election now, ma’am.”

“ Election ! What have you to do with the

election? The fact is, you don't go."

"Yes, that is just it; you have no more to say, ma'am."

"I thought as much, though I might be ashamed to own it. You are a bigoted, obstinate person I know, and I doubt your honesty—"

"Doubt my honesty, ma'am, and you think not indeed! No one ever doubted Thomas Flinter's honesty," cried the sturdy bailiff flaming out into anger.
"If you doubts it, ma'am, I'll prove it all."

"Nonsense, Flinter; I said I doubted it," replied Mrs. Ashted. She was always a little alarmed by his threats, knowing that the whole family would in a case take part against her. "I am not saying that you never will try to do better, only because it is new, when I told you that you were a bigoted, obstinate person."

and pleasure in the farm, and wish to see it the best managed in the county."

"Well, ma'am, and so it is; expence considered, it pays better than any for thirty miles round. And I don't like new things, that is for certain; more especial that *Fad-nab-washerwoman*, as you was a telling me about the other day."

"Well, I won't ask you to use that," observed Mrs. Ashton with a heightened colour, fearful lest Flinter should find out the fact that the highly lauded *Pferdknabewasserunger* was a hoax, shrewdly suspected to have been planned if not executed by Robert. "I wont say any thing more about it."

"Perhaps that might be as well, ma'am; but you knows best," replied Flinter with a look which still further heightened her ruddy bloom. The blunt and taciturn bailiff had much more penetration than people gave him credit for.

"I have been reading a book lately written

by a very clever man about soils, and that suit them best; and I have seen Tiler's field shall be put into wheat next year," continued Mrs. Ashton, taking no notice of the bailiff's comment, and speaking fast to her confusion. "You have it in barley which is wasting its goodness. I saw what a capital crop of wheat you had last year; and do try wheat again this year."

"Wheat arter barley! and wheat afore! Who ever heard of such a thing!" shouted the bailiff, plunging his knee some inches into the earth in the end of the row, in disgust and anger, drawing his feet up, and standing stiff and starch with his hands on his hips, like an awkward recruit at drill.

"It may be a very good plan, but I have not heard of it; for you never read any farming books."

"Larn farming from reading," retorted Flint, and claimed Flint contemptuously.

“ Yes, much may be learned from reading ; and at any rate, I insist on Tiler’s field being tried in wheat next year.”

“ I could not in my conscience ma’am ; it would be a robbing of master, and I could not venture to show my face among the farmers—they would so jeer.”

“ Nonsense, Flinter, I will listen to no more folly. You can say I ordered it.”

“ You ordered it ! Well then, ma’am, it comes to this—be you to manage the farm, or be I ? If I, then it shan’t be wheat next year—that’s poz ;—if you, then I’ll go and wish master and the family good bye directly, for I won’t stay where I can be of no use, receiving wages for nothing—that would not be honest. Lord Fitz Elwyn will take me any day, and jump to have me too—I knows that.”

“ You are so hot and headstrong there is no getting you to listen to reason,” observed Mrs. Ashton excessively provoked ; and yet afraid to

persist in having Tiler's field cropped as she wished.

"There is no reason in having wheat after barley; and no reasonable person would say so."

"It is of no use disputing the point, you are so obstinate, and always will have your own way," said Mrs. Ashton walking off in great vexation, part of which was discharged on the head of the unhappy poultry woman, who had neglected some of her minute directions touching the young turkies.

To be sure! and I always will have my own way—when I can," muttered Flinter, snatching his heavy stick out of the earth, and trudging off in an opposite direction, mumbling to himself about—"honesty—Purcell's pigs—wheat after barley—and what should women know of farming?"

"What is the matter, Flinter? do you mean to walk over me?" asked Cecil, stepping out of the way of the offended bailiff, who was strid-

ing on at a prodigious pace along a narrow path.

“Walk over you, Miss Cecil! Lord love ye, no. I would not do such a wickedness as that for a great deal; you are always so civil and kind spoken. But you see, Miss Cecil, missus have been putting me into a pet, wanting to have wheat arter barley, and wheat the year afore too. Such a thing was never heard of! Even you would know better than that.”

“Not I indeed,” replied Cecil smiling.

“Well then you would believe what I said against it; and that would do just as well. And then missus have been worrying me about Purcell’s pigs. Choke them pigs! they be the most aggravating pigs I ever met with. They be always in our best turmit field, and yet I can never catch them there, or I would pound them in a minute. I am sure them pigs keeps a watchman, or the Purcell’s boys watches for them; and sees me a mile off.”

“You like roast beef—and the pigs like

turnips;—it is a natural liking your turnips are so very tempting highly amused at his abuse of the

“ May be, Miss Cecil; but roast beef that don’t belong to me can’t accuse me of dishonesty.”

“ And I am sure I don’t, Flin the immorality of the pigs proceed

“ It is very aggravating them I’ll have them yet. Howsomde glad to see you smile, Miss Cecil thing; for you have been looking cholly of late; but I have a piece for you. Never mind what Lord says; he don’t know what to be and so he takes pleasure in vexing from good authority that if Lord don’t get the election, which I as hopes and thinks, he will run hard at any rate. Lord Fitz E gentleman, and has a monstrous of farming; and ’grees with me

We have often a talk together, and he always speaks as kind and civil as if I was a viscount, and that, in course, makes me more humble and respectful. He is the man to my mind; and so I hope the county will say too—and somebody else besides. He is very poplar among the poor you may depend upon that; and if I hears any more good news about him, I'll be sure and tell you, Miss Cecil. He ain't going to have Lady Barbara—I'll be bail for that. Keep up your spirits, and get your colour, and then all will go right—trust Thomas Flinter, who sees more of these matters than most people think for. So I wish you a good morning, for I must go arter them pigs," cried the honest bailiff, doffing his hat in the most respectful style, and leaving Cecil with cheeks as red as his favorite Sunday waistcoat, whilst he trudged after Purcell's pigs, muttering as before. "I saw her turn all of a tremble one day when he rode up with Sir Thomas; and he don't talk so long to me all for nothing, nor

about the farm neither. He likes me to say something about her, though he never asks; and looks any how and no how when I names her. Ay, ay, Thomas Flinter knows something about lovers still, though he was very young when he courted Bessy Purvis; and now he is getting an old man. Poor Bessy! I thought I should have died of a broken heart when I saw her put into the grave; but these people, and especially men, don't die for sorrow after all, they are very bad at first, and thinks of nothing else! and then some how or other, little by little, they begin to think of one thing, and another, till at last they go about their work like other folks. Poor persons who have to get their living have not so much time to vex as the gentry, who have nothing else to do; and so perhaps we are better off in some things after all; and the world ain't so unequal. If we have not one thing to fret us, we have another, or else we worries ourselves, not being contented with what God gives us. I never

had a second sweetheart, but helps all true lovers for Bessy's sake as she may know if she knows any thing; and I hopes to meet her hereafter at the day of judgment to tell her so. When I am doubtful sometimes about taking another glass, I thinks of what Bessy used to say about drinking; and then I puts it down again. We can't do any thing that would vex those we really love even though they are in their graves."

However slightly Mr. Ashton appeared to receive Flinter's warning at the time, he afterwards named the subject to his wife; who in her turn, though equally incredulous and angry with the bailiff for such a supposition, questioned her daughter on the subject, whose replies set her fears completely at rest.

Sarah knew that Captain Hartley was going away, for he had told her so some days before; and he had also named his intention of calling to take leave of the Ashton's, fixing an hour when she would be engaged elsewhere; in

short, the girl's manner was so pertinent when she spoke of his departure that Mrs. Ashton was not only completely satisfied, but triumphant. "It was a piece of scandal to vex her. As if any day could even imagine such an indiscretion!" The suspicion was allayed to both she determined; so when Sarah really did call to take leave she did so in her manner, and profuse in her wishes.

Sarah's sudden show of indifference would have been less satisfactory to her mother if it had been more penetrating.

CHAPTER II.

It was the evening preceding the day of nomination ; and to rectify some mistake about the attendance of certain influential gentlemen on the morrow, Robert Ashton undertook a late ride of several miles. Mr. Fleetwood was warm in his thanks ; but Robert checked his expressions of gratitude, conscious that his apparent zeal arose rather from the fretting restlessness of his own spirit, than from any exalted friendship for the young candidate.

The message was delivered—the mistake

rectified—and Robert was on his way to Harston, whence he was to accompany more of Mr. Fleetwood's friends to the County Hall, when he was in his headlong speed, for slow not his excited humour, by a disbursement of sixpence, between the man at the door and a gentleman's valet, occupying the travelling carriage. He would not stop there; but there was not space for him to go any farther; he was obliged to wait till the servant had received another sixpence, and received a further delay, as the toll keeper was old and slow, and his voice from the carriage urged him to go on.

That voice was neither unknown nor pleasant to his ears—it was the voice of Captain Hartley; and as the carriage passed, he saw by the glimmering of the light from the dim light of the moon, that the female companion.

Where could Captain Hartley

that time of night, and with a female too? At best, it was suspicious. He might be mistaken; but if not, who could the female be? And then again what could it matter to him, either the purpose of the Captain's singularly timed journey, or the name of his fair friend? Reason answered nothing; but he was in too excited a state to listen to reason. Notwithstanding his boasts to Cecil he had strong fears as to the issue of the coming contest:—he had been irritated throughout the day with accounts of the number of votes promised to Lord Fitz Elwyn—every fresh report had increased his ill will towards the viscount; and, above all, to enable him to endure fatigue and keep up his spirits he had been drinking more than usual—not enough to make him stupid—not enough to obscure his faculties; but just enough to render him more touchy, more irascible and suspicious than he was by nature.

Captain Hartley was Fitz Elwyn's cousin; and his character justified the supposition that

if he had a female with him and was one whom he would be recognised. To expose him was a scandal on the opposite grounds for annoying squibs on morality, if nothing else, and rage against Fitz Elwyn, and whether such a proceeding was generous.

It was a mysterious circle of hated mysteries; that is, he hated them, so, after he had pursued his refection for more than two months, he turned his horse's head and gave up his carriage to the great surprise of the public. He knew by the ticket that it was the county town, and there, in the county town he followed as far as his horse would bear him, his knowledge of the country enabling him to choose a path less than that pursued by those who

"Has a dark travelling car

servant behind passed through?" he enquired of the toll keeper at the entrance to Nelthorpe, who was a favorer of the purples.

"Not five minutes since, sir."

"Who was in it?"

"Captain Hartley, sir, Lord Lindmoor's nephew; and a lady with a straw bonnet, pink ribbons, and white shawl, whose face I could not see as her veil was down, though, as I fancied from the servant's looks that it was a Gretna Green affair, I pretended to find fault with the ticket, and flashed my lantern into the carriage. I should not have done it to one of our own party, sir. To be sure, he had not four horses; but then horses are scarce just now; or perhaps the Captain had only a pair to deceive people."

For a minute Robert stood aghast and confounded; then flinging half a crown to the man for his intelligence, he buried the rowels of his spurs in the horse's sides and galloped on more furiously than ever.

A straw bonnet with pink ribbon shawl; such was Sarah's usual dress. Captain Hartley, who had heard comments on her beauty, and dim as by light he fancied that now with a hint he could recognise his sister's night fugitive.

If anxious to overtake the carriage, he was still more anxious to do so now. Personal injury sharpened him to a point. The gambler and the libertine, who had been the hospitality shown him by her, was now persuaded a girl, scarcely seventeen, was with him, forgetful of all her duties, and only yield up his prize, but with offence with his blood. Nothing could appease his rage. To conceal his name, to save her from scandal and nothing in comparison to sating his vengeance. Hartley was Fitz Elton—the viscount should be wounded cousin.

Though nearly one o'clock, the inhabitants of the good town of Nelthorpe were not all at rest; lights still gleamed from some of the upper windows, and men were hurrying through the streets, or stopping in groups of two or three to talk over the nomination that was to take place in the great hall on the succeeding morning. These turned their heads as Robert galloped up the ill pitched streets, the clatter of his horse's hoofs sounding almost fearful in the stilly night, whilst the sparks struck from the rough stones as he passed, resembled the spirited description of Leonora's spectre bridegroom in his midnight ride. One man taking him for an express shouted to ask his news; but he made no reply—he did not even hear the question, but held on his headlong course, heedless of the wonder his speed excited. He reckoned that the fugitive would stop to change horses if not at the first inn, then at the next; and on he sped till he saw the dark travelling carriage which he had so

hotly pursued standing before a large old fashioned hotel, that a back from the street, having a ~~sm~~ before it, the front of which was decorated with sky blue ribbons that he might have seen at a ~~gl~~ rendezvous of the whigs, had already aware of its being the ~~he~~ Lord Fitz Elwyn and his particu

The weary horses just released traces were walking off towards panting and smoking; whilst ~~for~~ were putting to as quickly as ostlers being urged to speed by ~~6~~ ley's servant, who complained of not being ready according to ~~a~~ idlers with the blue badge were about the yard, and two or ~~th~~ were standing in the door-way Ashton saw none of these—he carriage containing his sister and lover, for, during his ride, he

worked himself up into a fiercer rage, but also into a certainty that Captain Hartley's female companion could be no other than Sarah.

Blinded by his wrath, his only idea was to tear her from her lover's arms, and inflict on him the punishment which he so well deserved; and for this purpose, reining up his horse abruptly at the side on which he expected to find his sister, he sprang to the ground, and wrenching open the door called fiercely on Sarah to come forth, either not caring or not considering that by so doing he would attract the attention of the loiterers, and thereby make his sister's elopement the popular subject of conversation among ostlers, stableboys, and other chance listeners.

"Come forth this instant, Sarah, or I must compel you," repeated the infuriated Robert almost choking with passion, stretching forth his hand to grasp her arm and enforce obedience.

"What do you mean by this violence,"

demanded Captain Hartley, that grasp, for it was that gentleman's Sarah's on which he had laid so

"Give up my sister, or take the consequences," cried Robert furiously setting and clenching his fist.

"You are beside yourself, Mr. Barton, or you would show more concern for your sister's fair fame than to demand of me in such a public place my way to my mother, who is ill," begged you to allow me to proceed without hindrance," replied Captain Hartley with coolness and self-possession that staggered his impetuous foe, who drew back a step.

"Drive on!" shouted Captain Hartley, availing himself of his opponent's hesitation, pulling too the door as he spoke.

But the postilions were not where the order could be obeyed. He was covered from his momentary surprise.

“ You stir not an inch till I have seen the features of the female beside you,” exclaimed Robert resolutely, again endeavouring to force open the door, which was firmly held from within.

“ You are not in your right senses, Mr. Ashton; and therefore I must shape my conduct accordingly, you are all honest blues,” he continued, speaking from the window to those in the court-yard. “ Will you let a purple—a madman stop your gallant young member’s cousin on his way to his sick mother ?”

“ No. No !” shouted those who had gathered round at his appeal.

“ A purple ! A purple in our very head quarters !—A spy ! a spy ! Let us take him to the pump !—Ay, ay ! the pump ! the pump !” responded others, rushing forward to seize Robert, who clung to the carriage door, his fury increased by his opponent’s coolness.

“ No row !—no disturbance my good friends ! Let us bring no disgrace on our cause by

violence," cried Lord Fitz Elwyn, the yard at the moment, accompanied by Captain Wilder, and another gentleman, as he spoke to stay the rising tide, perfectly unconscious of its cause.

"I appeal to your lordship for treatment:—for justice, if I may receive it from any of your race," said the highly excited Robert, dashing by the most of those who would have laid hands on him.

"I know none of my race from whom Robert Ashton would receive other than the most honorable treatment," replied Lord Fitz Elwyn warmly, for the young man's manner was more insulting than his words. The count's temper had already been tried by many *contre-temps* and some of his orders thought to have originated from the speaker. "I am exceedingly sorry for this untimely visit to our head and have subjected you to any incon-

I shall be happy to attend you to the abode of your friends, and thus secure you from all further annoyance."

"No, Lord Fitz Elwyn; I care not for all your myrmidons together. Set them on a defenceless man if you will an hour hence, but to prove the honor of which you boast, I call on you to give me up my sister, lured from her home by the arts of a villain—your cousin, Captain Hartley."

"You use strong and unfriendly language, Mr. Ashton, which can only be excused by some great family misfortune. I know nothing of your sister; and am not even aware to which of the Miss Ashtons you allude."

"You act wisely in denying all knowledge of your cousin's disgraceful conduct, my lord, since the tale would gain neither honor nor votes for the would-be-member for — — shire; and that it shall be told depend upon it."

"Tell what you please, Mr. Ashton, but look

that you tell the truth. Again I assure you that I know nothing of the elopement."

"Do you mean to say, my lord, that I have told, or would tell a lie?" demanded Robert, fiercely, advancing towards the viscount, and holding up his whip in a threatening attitude.

"You should know me better than to suppose that I could be moved to recall what I have said by threatening words, and threatening looks," replied Lord Fitz Elwyn, fronting his accuser, and standing prepared to wrench the whip from his hand, should he show the slightest symptoms of an intention to use it. "If you say that I know of, or had any share in, your sister's elopement, you say that which is not true:—if you do not say so, then my words cannot apply."

"But I do say ——"

"You do not know what you say, Robert," cried Captain Wilder, interrupting him, and laying his hand on the arm of the excited young

man. "You are too much agitated to be aware of the meaning of your words. What has happened to disturb you thus?"

"Drive on," said Captain Hartley, in a low voice to the postilion on the wheel horse, leaning out of the window to give the order, hoping to escape during the contention between his cousin and Mr. Ashton:—but he was mistaken.

"Stir not!" cried the authoratitive voice of Robert; and the postilion obeyed. "You say, my lord, that you know not of your cousin's elopement, if so, as a man of honor, you will join with me in demanding the restoration of my sister," he added, turning again to the viscount.

"I will do all that a man of honor should do, Mr. Ashton, though your words and manner are far from courteous. If my cousin have, as you assert, carried off your sister, I will neither defend his conduct, nor aid him in retaining the lady;—but where is the proof of this?"

"In that carriage."

"Is the charge against you true, Hartley?" demanded Lord Fitz Elwyn, trying to understand the cause of the commotion.

"I am no boy to answer the question, but I will defend myself against the charges of a cowardly man," replied Captain Hartley in a lofty tone.

"This is the pitiful evasion of a villain who has the boldness to commit an evil deed and not the courage to avow it. You cannot deny that a lady is now beside you," cried Robert Ashton furiously.

"Yes. Yes there is a lady standing in the corner—we can see her," cried the other voices. Some of the bystanders began to move round to the other side of the carriage to get a better view.

"Give up my sister, or receive the punishment due to such villainy," shouted Lord Fitz Elwyn, frantic with rage, shaking his white hair with a threatening air.

“ You have done evil enough already, Hartley; consider the feelings of a brother, and make all the amends you can,” observed Lord Fitz Elwyn to his cousin, his contempt for his conduct plainly indicated by his manner.

“ There has been no proof of evil against me yet,” replied Captain Hartley doggedly.

“ There is the lady by your side,” cried Robert fiercely.

“ Suppose that a lady has honored me with her company, you have not seen that lady’s face, therefore cannot know her name; and it is scarcely the act of a gentleman to alarm a female by such violence.”

“ Let me see the lady,” demanded Robert endeavouring to look into the carriage, and again half staggered by the Captain’s cool effrontery.

“ Excuse me, Mr. Ashton; that would indeed show a want of feeling and delicacy towards the fair lady, who has honored me with her preference.”

"A lady eloping with Captain Hartley, take the consequences; nothing else to me," replied Robert resolutely.

"It is impossible, as a man of honor I can gratify your curiosity," said Hartley, still shielding his companion from observation, whose whispered pleas were heard, but not understood by the other side of the carriage.

"Where is the honor in luring a woman to leave her home and become his mistress in a midnight flight, thus repaying the hospitality of her parents by bringing their child? Will you swear that you are not my sister?"

"I answer no more impertinent questions," said Mr. Ashton; and have already made sufficient allowance for your excitement, whether arising from wine or passion."

"You stir not till I have seen her," said Robert; "if I see her I will, though at the risk of one or both of us," shouted Robert.

to a state approaching frenzy by the cool and insulting manner of his opponent, seizing Captain Hartley, and attempting to drag him from the carriage as he spoke.

“Nay then, if it comes to that, you must take the consequences,” exclaimed the Captain, giving a loose to his anger, and throwing off his antagonist with a force which would have hurled him to the ground, had he not staggered against Captain Wilder, who upheld him.

“Drive on !” shouted Captain Hartley again ; but the horses could not have moved had the postillions so willed, from the crowd of spectators now gathered round.

“Let me go ! let me grapple with him !” cried Robert, bursting from Captain Wilder, and making a rush towards the carriage.

“Stop, stop ! For heaven’s sake, stop ! I have done wrong—let me return,” pleaded a female voice, in tones of passionate entreaty, broken by sobs.

“You are a fool !” muttered Captain Hart-

ley, as the lady clung to his arm to prevent further violence, whilst Robert struggled with Captain Wilder, and an old friend of his father's for freedom to make another attack.

“It is Sarah! I knew it was, base villain that you are! your life alone can atone for the insult,” cried the frenzied Robert, breaking from those who would have detained him, and reaching the door by a desperate spring.

“No. No : I entreat—I implore you, Robert, I have done very wrong—I will return—I will bear all the blame,” pleaded the sobbing, frightened girl.

“I blush for you, Hartley. Detain Miss Sarah Ashton no longer: your bride would have no cause to rejoice in her lot,” observed Lord Fitz Elwyn stepping between his cousin and the furious Robert.

“Nay, if the lady choose to go, let her depart; I detain no fair damsel against her will, though I might complain of her leading me into a course, which she has not the courage

to pursue. Her own conduct absolves me from all further concealment," replied Captain Hartley with unblushing effrontery, as he drew back to make room for the agitated girl to pass before him.

It was Fitz Elwyn who assisted her from the carriage, and supported her tottering steps when repulsed with a harsh rebuke by her brother, whose anger appeared little softened by her grief and penitence;—it was his voice that soothed her emotion with a father's tenderness, as, pitying her distress, he led her into the house to save her from the staring and observations of the wondering crowd. Robert in his wrath thought more of shooting her lover, than saving his sister from a wretched marriage; and was far more enraged at her having eloped with Fitz Elwyn's cousin, than touched by her bitter weeping and humble expressions of contrition.

"Let me go! I will not be withheld," exclaimed Robert with the wild rage of a mad-

man and much of a madman's strength, struggling fiercely with those who held him back.

But his struggles were vain. In obedience to a sign from Captain Wilder some of the bystanders closed in upon him, whilst others put up the carriage steps, and shut the carriage door.

"Drive on!" cried Mr. Lake, who had been drawn out of the house by the tumult.

The crowd gave way—the post boys cracked their whips—and the horses, after a little curvetting, for they had been alarmed at the noise, set off at full speed.

"I demand satisfaction," shouted the infuriated Robert, finding himself too strongly detained to be able to use the horse-whip as he had hoped.

"You have had the satisfaction of making your sister the subject of public conversation," shouted back Captain Hartley in reply.

It was some time before Captain Wilder and other friends could calm the fury of Robert

Ashton, and induce him to give up the mad design of following Captain Hartley ; indeed it was only at last effected by binding him over to keep the peace, his wrath amounting so nearly to insanity, that none could venture to calculate on what his conduct might be if left at liberty to follow the dictates of his passion.

“ You have had your own way gentlemen and shielded a villain from a brother’s just anger ; and I cannot count you friends,” said Robert sulkily, as he left the room to seek his sister, followed by Captain Wilder and Mr. Lake, who feared his encountering Lord Fitz Elwyn in his present humour ; but the viscount, after soothing the sobbing girl and persuading her to take a glass of wine, had delicately left the room into which he had conducted her, thinking she might find his presence painful.

“ Degenerate girl ! disgrace to your name and family !” was Robert’s address, advancing to the centre of the apartment his brows knit into a terrific frown.

The frightened Sarah shrank into a corner of the sofa trembling in every limb, whilst her sobs broke forth afresh.

“Come, come, Robert ; poor Sarah has suffered enough for her girlish fault,” pleaded the good natured Captain Wilder, who could never see a woman’s tears unmoved.

“Would you speak thus if Miss Wilder had run off with Edward?” questioned Robert sarcastically.

Captain Wilder’s eye kindled with anger, for he had already borne much from the furious speaker, making allowances for his provocation, and a cutting retort rose to his lips ; but Sarah’s sobs and Mr. Lake’s warning touch calmed down his wrath, and his answer was free from all irritating comment.

“Sarah is very young ; and Captain Hartley an adept in deceit, which Edward would disdain to use.”

“Sarah is young ; and that is her only excuse, though a very poor one ; and if my

mother take my advice she will turn her back to pinafores and the school-room. But a house filled with the partisans of my enemy is no place for us, so come along girl," he added grasping the arm of his shrinking sister.

"What do you purpose doing?" enquired Mr. Lake. "If you will allow me, I will restore Miss Sarah Ashton to her family."

"Excuse me, Mr. Lake; I neither understand, nor admire the fancy you have shown of late for interfering in our affairs," replied Robert sullenly. "I will take her back myself."

"I will order my carriage to be got ready directly for your use; by returning without further delay you may save your parents all anxiety," said Captain Wilder.

"I will not give you that trouble sir, I take no horses from—I remain no longer in a house whose inhabitants are devoted to the interest of Captain Hartley's cousin," replied Robert haughtily, bidding Sarah put on her bonnet which was lying on the sofa beside her.

“Nay, Robert, Lord Fitz Elwyn behaved admirably, though you said enough to try his temper ; and this has nothing to do with politics,” said Mr. Hare an old friend of the Ashtons, who, having known Robert from his birth, had followed Captain Wilder in case his acknowledged influence over the young man should be needed. “I am a tory as well as yourself, so there can be nothing in taking my advice.. To go to a purple house at this time of night would only render more public, what, had you acted prudently, might have been kept private. Wilder’s carriage shall come to the back door, as soon as possible ; and thus Sarah will escape being stared at.”

“A young lady who elopes cannot have much dread of that I should imagine. But it seems that I am not to have my way in any thing to-night, so arrange all as you please ; only remembering that I feel no gratitude for the interference.”

“We ask no thanks,” said Captain Wilder,

quitting the room with Mr. Lake to give the needful orders, leaving Mr. Hare to soothe the irritated young man into a more amiable temper.

Mr. Hare's success was very limited. Robert no longer uttered violent threats, but his sullen demeanour gave little proof of a gentler mood.

On his way to the carriage, dragging rather than supporting his still weeping sister, he accidentally encountered Lord Fitz Elwyn.

"Your friends have prevented my inflicting on your cousin the chastisement he so well deserves; but I shall meet your lordship in the hall to-morrow, and will then ask the freholders of the county of —— if they will have for their member one of a family who lure young girls from their parents' protection."

"I am ready to meet you when and where you please, Mr. Ashton," replied the viscount, drawing himself up to his full height, and returning the speaker's look of defiance.

Mr. Hare stepped between, and Robert passed on without further comment.

“It is such a beautiful night that I will accompany you,” said Mr. Hare mounting to the dickey, after closing the door on the brother and sister.

“You must do as you like ; I have no voice to-night,” replied Robert doggedly.

It was long past eleven at Ashton Grove, and Mr. and Mrs. Ashton were in their first sleep, when the lady was roused by a knocking at her door.

“Come in,” said Mrs. Ashton, supposing it to be the maid, and scarcely knowing whether it was late or early.

“I wants to speak with master,” cried the hoarse voice of Flinter through the door.

“Bless me, Flinter ! is that you ? What is the matter ? Is the house on fire, or have you caught Purcell’s pigs ?” questioned Mrs. Ashton, starting up in bed.

“Hang Purcell’s pigs !” exclaimed Flinter *sotto voce*, repeating aloud—“I wants to speak with master directly.”

“ Mr. Ashton ! Mr. Ashton, I say ! Flinter wants to speak with you directly,” hollowed the lady into her husband’s ear, who had understood the whole of the conversation, but, according to his wont, was waiting to hear what would come next.

“ What is the matter, Flinter ?” demanded Mr. Ashton leisurely putting on his dressing gown, his wife echoing the question.

“ Make haste, make haste, sir !” answered Flinter, stamping with impatience at the delay.

“ Well, Flinter, what is the matter ?” asked Mr. Ashton in his usual placid tone, as he opened the door, and stood fronting the impatient bailiff.

“ Matter enough, sir ! You don’t suppose I would make so bold as to knock at Missus’s door for nothing. As sure as a plough share Miss Sarah is off. The dogs was rampageous so I got up, and walked round the house ; and there was a ladder at Miss Sarah’s window, and the window open, and a light flaring ; and

so I made bold to mount the ladder, and, after calling on Miss Sarah, to step into her room; but there was no Miss Sarah there; and her things seemed scattered about as if she had pulled them out, and had not had time to put them back again. As sure as a team, sir, she is off with Captain Hartley, as I told you she would; thof you laughed at my warning."

"Good Heavens! and this is my doing, the effects of my indolence! And gone with such a character!" exclaimed the shocked and astonished father, staggering against the doorpost.

"Never stop to consider, sir, what has been done; but think what you can do," cried Flinter, who was a man of energy, if not of words, and looked on his master's interest as his own. "Do you dress as quick as you can, sir; and I will saddle the fastest horse in the stable;—it would take too much time to get the carriage out—Miss Sarah can't have been gone long; and I know from Jem that Captain

Hartley is to pass through Nelthorpe, so by taking the short cut, you may overtake them yet. The Captain would not mind me, or I would go myself."

Mr. Ashton prepared to follow the honest bailiff's advice; but his indolence had grown upon him till any very great haste was beyond his power; and he was besides delayed and bewildered by his curious wife who asked a thousand questions which he could not answer, and would fain have swathed him with a thousand wraps more fitted for January than August.

When fairly beyond the clatter of Mrs. Ashton's tongue with the night breeze playing on his brow, and a spirited horse beneath him the effects of the rude shock passed rapidly away, whilst a parent's anxiety restored to him some of the energy of his youth. The horse was urged to its utmost speed; and the village was soon left far behind.

"Is that you, Ashton?" shouted a gentle-

man from the dickey of a carriage, which he encountered a few miles this side of Nethorpe.

“ Yes, Hare, but I cannot stop now,” replied the agitated father, reining in his horse for an instant to give him breath.

“ If you seek your daughter, she is here with Robert, well and safe.”

“ Thank Heaven !” exclaimed Mr. Ashton, the reins dropping from his hands, which were clasped in fervent gratitude.

Mr. Hare got down, and drawing Mr. Ashton aside, explained as briefly as possible all that had passed, pleading for indulgence towards Sarah, who seemed truly penitent; and engaging the father to use all his influence to soothe the anger of his son.

This private conversation was broken off by Robert’s joining them.

“ I bring you back your daughter, sir, who is a disgrace to her name ; and only regret that her base lover escaped unpunished, thanks to

the interference of those, who call themselves your friends."

"I am much obliged for that interference, Robert. My distress at my daughter's elopement would only have been aggravated by any act of violence on her brother's part; and the less that elopement becomes known, the better for all," replied his father reprovingly.

"So, sir, Mr. Hare has already won you over to his side, I see. But the elopement is known, and shall be known. Lord Fitz Elwyn shall hear of it on the hustings."

"Not with my consent, Robert. Lord Fitz Elwyn should not be made answerable for the sins of his cousin; he did all that man could do, and his gentlemanly bearing throughout the election towards all his opponents demands equally courteous conduct from us. Your present temper is neither befitting a brother, nor a christian."

"I am deeply wounded by the disgrace brought on my family by this elopement, if

you call that an unbrotherly and unchristian feeling," replied Robert sullenly, yet not daring to encounter his father's rebuking look.

"You are more angry than grieved, and that is why I condemn you. Sarah is very young; and I allowed her to see too much of Captain Hartley after having been warned of his character, so that part of the blame must rest with me and your mother, whose anxiety we should appease as soon as possible."

"Certainly, sir. You and Mr. Hare had better proceed to Ashton Grove with all speed; and I will take your horse and return to Nelthorpe."

"No; do you ride on before to Ashton Grove, and calm your mother's fears. We will take fresh horses at Sandford, and thus give Wilder's time to rest, that they may be ready for Hare and you on your return."

Robert would have remonstrated, but Mr. Ashton for once was prompt and peremptory, so his son yielded, though with a bad grace,

expending some portion of his displeasure on the poor horse ; and a greater portion in so colouring the late occurrences, when relating them to his mother, as to make it appear that Lord Fitz Elwyn had known of, if not aided in the elopement.

“ I will remount the dickey ; Sarah would rather be alone with you, I have no doubt,” said the considerate Mr. Hare.

Sarah had gathered herself up in a corner of the carriage, compressed into as small a compass as possible. When her father entered she neither spoke nor looked up, but the deep heaving of her bosom showed how strongly she was agitated.

“ I will not add to your distress by severe comments, my child, since you already feel your error. I need not say how deeply your conduct has pained me,” said Mr. Ashton mildly.

Sarah raised her eyes ; and by a gleam of moonshine saw tears on her father’s cheek.

She had made no reply to her brother's bitter reproaches—she had half begun to repent her return, fearing the reproofs she should receive from others ; but her father's tenderness could not be withstood ; that tenderness gave a deeper colouring of guilt to her fault, and with a bitter cry she flung herself into his arms, and burst into a passion of tears.

“ I have done very wrong—can you forgive me ?” faltered the sobbing girl, as her father pressed her to his heart, his tears mingling with hers.

“ Yes, my child--fully—freely. I knew what Captain Hartley was ; and yet I permitted you to be beguiled by his plausible manners ; or at best I did not act as decidedly as I should have done. Part of the blame must rest with me.”

“ No, no ; I alone am to blame,” cried Sarah more and more touched by this soothing kindness. “ I should not have listened to his vows—I should not have heeded his promises !

you could never think—you could never believe that I should so far forget my duty. I felt all this as soon as I was in the carriage; but he would not let me return—he silenced my scruples by protestations of unchanging affection. You cannot forgive me; and what will my mother say? I can never look her, and Emma, and Cecil in the face again!” exclaimed the sobbing Sarah, wringing her hands.

Mr. Ashton saw that no reproof from others was needed—that her own conscience was a more bitter accuser than her worst foe; and he only sought to calm her anguish, which had been cruelly heightened by Robert’s threats.

It was evident from some words dropped by her in her grief that Captain Hartley’s conduct since she had left her father’s house, particularly his behaviour at the inn, had not raised him in her estimation; and Mr. Ashton was relieved from all fear of her ever again becoming the victim of his arts. With this conviction he had no hesitation, after a few sage ad-

monitions, in promising oblivion of the past on the part of himself and her mother; and the ardent gratitude of the humbled, penitent girl promised well for the future.

For Mrs. Ashton to be in a fidget, or a vexation, and not fidget and vex others was out of the chapter of possibilities, so round she went to the whole family, rousing all with the account of the elopement—uttering a thousand wonderings and strange conjectures, till a serious misfortune was almost turned into a ludicrous adventure, so thoroughly ridiculous were some of her suppositions and lamentations. To remain quiet in their rooms was out of the question; so the inmates of Ashton Grove assembled in the study, the windows of which overlooked the road to the house, watching for Mr. Ashton's return.

The intelligence brought by Robert was received with a general cry of thankfulness; and Mrs. Ashton's gratitude having a little subsided, she began to think more of scolding

Sarah than of rejoicing in her safe return ; but her husband spoke so decidedly concerning the promised forgiveness, and abstinence from all reproach, painting the culprit's penitence in such moving terms, that his wife promised to receive her without even a reproving look, and when Mr. Ashton led the trembling girl into her presence really kept her promise far better than could have been expected from one, who had so great a taste for talking and setting every one to rights.

It was impossible to scold such a poor, broken-hearted creature ; and all but Robert, who sat sullenly apart, received the weeping fugitive with more than their usual kindness. Emma and Cecil soon led her away to her own room, where they sat beside her, soothing and caressing her, till overcome by grief and fatigue, she sank into a heavy sleep.

Sarah being restored to her home, it was time that Mr. Hare and Robert should think of returning to Nelthorpe, in readiness for the

nomination which was to take place at ten in the morning ; for the stars were already growing pale in the lightening sky.

Before their departure, Mr. Ashton again spoke to his son on the subject of his future demeanour towards Lord Fitz Elwyn, but Robert's sullen replies and muttered denunciations were not only unsatisfactory but alarming, as showing a mood that would break out into open hostility with, or perhaps without the slightest provocation. Why his son was so inveterate against the viscount he could not imagine, yet that he was so he could not doubt ; but whether that inveteracy was personal, or only political he could not determine. To argue the point seemed hopeless, for there was evidently some unassigned cause for anger, which, as the arguer could not divine, his arguments could not reach. All that was left was to lay his positive commands upon him to abstain from annoying Lord Fitz Elwyn in any way by look, word or act.

“Then, sir, I must break my word to Fleetwood, and disarrange his plans by not going to the nomination,” replied Robert doggedly.

“Better do that than offer insult to an honorable opponent, who has done you no injury; but I see no necessity for breaking your word. No one can control their temper more resolutely than yourself, if you so choose.”

“Not when the fit is on me, as it now is.”

“Then you must shake off the fit, which is worthy of reproof; for I lay my command upon you—the command of a parent, that you do nothing which can in any way annoy Lord Fitz Elwyn.”

Robert longed to rebel; but there was a something so controlling in the decided tone and manner of his placid, and generally indulgent parent, that he looked away in silence, his own conscience turning witness against him.

“I do not often command you, Robert, not

as often I fear as I should. You will not now deny me the obedience of a child."

"No, sir, no. I submit, but it will be a hard struggle," replied his son walking to the window.

"The greater the temptation, the greater the merit of withstanding it. Seek strength from above; and you may—you will subdue that fitful temper, which so often obscures your better qualities, and make me tremble for your future fate."

"Tremble for my future fate, sir! Oh never do that!—it will be after the usual fashion, I dare say—

"Born and wedded,
Dead and buried,"—

exclaimed his son with a reckless gaiety, which pained his hearer.

"There is something in all this, Robert, that I do not understand," said his father, approaching and striving to look into his averted face.

"I am glad to hear that, my dear father; I

would not for the world be like the child's primer understood by every four year old. But what say you, sir, to going with me to the nomination, and keeping me in order by your presence? I really doubt being a good boy without it."

This was a startling proposition to an indolent man; but Mr. Ashton had a fair excuse.

"No, Robert; you have given me your promise, and that once given I know I may rely upon you. My appearing at the nomination now, having before declined to do so, might seem an act of open hostility towards Lord Lindmoor and his son, whom I acquit of all knowledge, or participation in their relative's misconduct."

"Well, sir, if you won't—you won't; and therefore I may as well be off with Mr. Hare, that we may snatch what sleep we can. So good night, or rather good morning," exclaimed Robert leaving the room in dudgeon, saying to himself as he crossed the hall, "Who would

have thought of his guessing my motive for wishing his presence at the nomination ? But perhaps he did not guess—it might be only his indolence after all.”

Poor Sarah was so wretched, notwithstanding the kindness of all her family, fancying reproach in looks and words where no reproach was intended, that it was thought better she should leave home for a time till the story had died away, and her own feelings become less sensitive ; so on the following Monday she set off for the abode of her maternal aunt, who resided in the neighbouring county, escorted by Charles ; Mrs. Ashton seeming to think that the election could not possibly proceed were she to be absent.

Mr. Ashton was right in saying that he could rely on his son's promise. Whatever hatred there might be in his heart towards Lord Fitz Elwyn, there was no open show of it in words or acts ; but his avoidance of the viscount, and his cold, bare civility when they

were accidentally thrown together, might be held as the token of more unfriendly feelings than were shown by deeds. Of course no allusion to the elopement was made in the county hall, and some hours of reflection, joined to his conversation with his father, had made Robert conscious of the imprudence and impropriety of his late violent conduct, both as regarded himself, and his sister; but it was no longer in his power to bury the elopement in oblivion.

We must all have remarked how greedily during an election every scandalous anecdote is seized on, amplified and exaggerated by the worthless of both parties to bring reproach on their opponents; and though the delicacy and honor of the two candidates, as we have already said, checked this disgraceful taste for slander in a great degree, still it was impossible for the heads to keep their tails within the desired bounds. An elopement—and such an elopement—at such a time was too good and legiti-

mate a subject for abuse and ridicule to be passed over in silence, or omitted in print and chalk, so, even on the following morning before the nomination, squibs headed 'The elopement,' were passing from hand to hand of those who could read fluently—spelt on the walls by those who knew little more than their letters; and chalked on houses, doors, and gates by the idle and the mischievous.

What gave greater notoriety to the subject, rendering it less likely to die away, was its being seized on by both parties as a source of annoyance to their adversaries; the blues throwing all the blame and ridicule on the Ashtons, whilst the purples did the same on the Lindmoors, each inventing or improving falsehoods, which greatly heightened the scandal; so that the squibs were not only in pale blue letters; but also in deep purple, whilst the cries of the contending parties were equally contradictory.

“Where is the brave Captain who carried

off the young lady, and then ran away himself?" shouted the purples.

"Where is the young lady who took in the gallant officer, got him to elope with her; and then left him in the lurch?" re-shouted the blues.

"Who drove off as fast as he could, for fear of a horse-whipping?" enquired a loud-voiced purple.

"Who pretended to be in a passion, and coaxed his friends to bind him over to keep the peace, lest he should be forced to stand a shot?" replied an equally shrill-voiced blue.

Then there were caricatures of Robert in his passion—the Captain in his coolness—and Sarah in her tears, of every possible size and description, with the addition of Lord Fitz Elwyn and Captain Wilder looking very stately, and noble, or very hot and ridiculous, according to the partialities of the caricaturists.

Robert was so enraged at these insulting shouts that in his fury he would have attacked

a whole band of blues, had not Mr. Hare, who purposely kept beside him, grasped his arm, at the same time representing the prudence of passing over such attacks in silence, as the best chance of the occurrence being sooner forgotten ; adding a hint that but for his frantic violence of the night before the elopement might not have become the subject of general conversation.

“ True,” replied Robert conscience stricken, but not humbled, clenching his fist till the nails entered his flesh.

And yet whilst acknowledging the truth of the accusation, he panted to fix a quarrel on Fitz Elwyn, scarcely withheld by his promise to his father from so doing ; and so strange and savage was his mood throughout the day that he bitterly reproached Mr. Fleetwood for not stopping these painful allusions, a thing absolutely beyond his power to effect.

To Edward the squibs and cries were still more distressing, save that he had no violence

wherewith to reproach himself, and felt more pain than anger, a pain alleviated, as far as it could be, by the watchful kindness of Lord Fitz Elwyn, who said and did all that the truest friend, or most affectionate brother could have said or done. His cheek was flushed and his head bowed, when the hateful cries first reached his ear; and even Lord Lindmoor, who had been much irritated by the report of Robert's angry accusations, was so touched by Edward's shame and sorrow, that he showed him marked attention, and condescended to express his deep regret and displeasure at his nephew's share in the elopement.

It was amidst these varying shouts and feelings that the doors of the hall were thrown open to admit the freeholders to the nomination, which differed too little from other nominations to require a circumstantial detail.

The High Sheriff made the usual address, and usual request that every speaker should obtain a fair hearing. The Earl of Barringham

and a Mr. Lander proposed and seconded Lord Fitz Elwyn, in neat and appropriate speeches, as the papers announced; and another earl and another landed gentleman did ditto by Mr. Fleetwood, amid the applauses of their friends, and the hisses of their opponents. Then Lord Fitz Elwyn addressed the assembled freeholders in a manly and eloquent speech, which was much applauded by his friends, and listened to with tolerable patience by his adversaries; and then Mr. Fleetwood did the same with the same success, as was asserted by the 'County Advertiser,' and the 'County Chronicle.'

The show of hands was nearly equal, but the High Sheriff, after a very particular scrutiny, pronounced the majority to be in favor of Lord Fitz Elwyn, which said announcement was received with deafening shouts by the blues, and hisses and hootings by the purples, who, according to the custom of losers, accused the Sheriff of partiality. The friends of Mr. Fleetwood demanded a poll, and the election was

fixed to take place on the succeeding Monday.

The rival candidates bowed to each other with all gentlemanly courtesy before quitting the hall; and their several adherents promised thereupon to perform impossibilities in behalf of their respective favorites, whilst bands of idle non-voters, purple and blue, paraded the streets, deafening the good people of Nelthorpe with their discordant shouts, and occasionally indulging themselves in a little skirmish. Yet on the whole, thanks to the care of the leaders, it was considered a very orderly mob for an election; and all admitted that the contest was carried on with less ill blood than usual on such occasions.

Robert Ashton's fist was again clenched at the Sheriff's announcement in favour of Lord Fitz Elwyn, though he could not in his heart accuse him of partiality, and he muttered—'He shall not win,' burst through his set teeth; a mutter so fierce that his next neighbour looked upon him, as timid men look on a madman.

CHAPTER III.

HOWEVER energetic Mr. Ashton might have shown himself in reclaiming his daughter, or calming his son, the lapse of a short time fully proved that energy was not his characteristic ; activity was his strange work, not his daily occupation. He had promised to support Mr. Fleetwood, and Robert being too much engaged to come over in person had written very strongly, urging him to vote on the first day, as being a more handsome course towards the young

candidate ; but in spite of that letter, and in spite of his wife's constant worrying, for her persuasions really amounted to that, he put off his visit to Nelthorpe till the second day, and even then started so late that Mrs. Ashton predicted the closing of the poll before his arrival. The indolent habits of long years cannot be broken through by an indolent man in a minute ; he may be excited into temporary energy, but the excitement past, he sinks into his former lethargy, like the boa gorged with his meal. His daughter's elopement, partly the effect of his own negligence, had shown him the evil of his indolence ; and he determined to struggle with his natural love of quiet and procrastination ; but, unhappily, like too many others conscious of error he deferred the struggle till some future time, excusing himself in the present instance on account of his repugnance to vote against Lord Fitz Elwyn, whose delicate attention to Sarah, related by the grateful girl, had raised him still higher in

his esteem. To give his vote the first day might seem like putting himself forward against the viscount ; — then, by some unforeseen chance, that day might end the contest, and thus he would be spared the voting against him at all. To be sure, as his wife would have said, Mr. Fleetwood, the son of an old friend, might feel hurt at his backwardness, but then every body knew that he hated a bustle, and always kept clear of politics ; and so he deferred recording his vote till circumstances gave that vote an importance which would not have attached to it had it been given earlier.

At the close of the first day's poll Mr. Fleetwood had a majority of ten ; and his party, who were in high spirits, redoubled their efforts to increase that majority ; and among his party none were so zealous—none worked so hard as Robert Ashton.

“ I shall owe my election principally to you. How can I thank you ! ” said Mr. Fleetwood, shaking his hand with an energy that showed

how much in spite of his outward courtesy to his rival he panted to defeat him.

So said Mr. Fleetwood—so said his friends—delighted at the fiery zeal of the whig proselyte ; but Robert turned from their praise with a crimson blush and a sinking heart. He did not deserve their praise—he cared not that Mr. Fleetwood should win—he only toiled that Lord Fitz Elwyn should lose. His moving motive was neither friendship nor patriotism. The triumph of his party would only bring shame to him, for he was still a whig at heart ; yet his vote was recorded for the tory candidate—his time was at the disposal of the tory committee. Had any other started in opposition to Mr. Fleetwood but Lord Fitz Elwyn, his vote and his time would have been given to that other. A smile was on his lip ; but the vulture of remorse was at his heart, and he had neither the courage, nor the generosity to avow his error, and free himself from its gnawing ;—

it was eating his strength and life away, but he would bear it.

If Mr. Fleetwood's party were urged to great exertions by their majority, Lord Fitz Elwyn's were urged to still greater efforts by the smallness of that majority, which was in itself a triumph, the county having been hitherto considered decidedly tory; so that the endeavours of both were pushed to the utmost from the continued doubtfulness of the issue, party spirit waxing hotter at each fresh account.

For some hours the victory wavered from blue to purple, and purple to blue, as the accounts from the different polling places came in, the majority on either side being so small that the contest at last partook of the excitement of gambling, for a large stake. At three o'clock, as well as could be ascertained, the blues were two a head; and the election had been carried on with so much spirit, that nearly all the freeholders had voted, and the polling

flagged so considerably that a quarter of an hour elapsed without a vote being recorded; and then came in the probably final account from two neighbouring towns, that lessened the majority of the blues to one; and it was just at this moment, whilst the purples were shouting like mad at the announcement; and the blues shouting back as if madder still, that poor, quiet, peaceable, Mr. Ashton, who hated politics and a mob, as the unholy hate the holy, tried to make his way up a crowded street towards the principal polling booth, which was close to the hustings, that way being blocked up by the clamorous crowd increasing every moment in the hope of hearing the issue of the struggle which must be so soon decided.

Mr. Ashton being blessed with one of the most placid of tempers was not likely to get into a quarrel—being tall, stood little chance of being run over or trodden down; and being fearless was not alarmed by the angry cries of

the jostling multitude, but, beyond these, he had no requisite for piercing through a dense mass of human bodies. Patience which was his grand specific for overcoming difficulties was comparatively of little use to him in his present situation. The whole of the square in the centre of which stood the hustings and principal polling booth was nearly as crowded as the space around him, and thus he had no chance of being carried on by the populace to the spot he sought to reach; and to move forward singly where all were jammed so closely required a far more energetic effort than he was inclined to make; so there he remained, leaving every thing to chance, whilst the chiming of the various clocks showed the lapse of time, swayed backwards and forwards by the crowd: now annoyed by a very short man creeping under his arms—and then by a very tall one leaning over his shoulder; whilst his feet were trodden on by tall and short, males

and females, for there were females in the crowd, and with babies in their arms too, according to the custom of an English mob.

Talk of patience on a monument! Mr. Ashton thought it was nothing to patience in a crowd, which was in his opinion far more deserving of immortality at the poet's hand, or rather from the poet's pen.

The cheers and the counter cheers on the declaration that the blues had only a majority of one died away at length, but the comparative calm and silence neither aided nor hindered Mr. Ashton in his purpose of advance, for, utterly unused, as we have said, to mobs and elections, he never perceived that the two parties had by tacit consent taken opposite sides of the street, the more violent of both contending in the centre, the more quiet keeping to the pavement; and failed to observe the distinctive badges of blue and purple worn by all, till his attention was painfully drawn to the

fact by the notice beginning to be bestowed on the enormous rosette of the latter colour, which had been tied into his button hole by his careful spouse. Whether she thought the size of his rosette would increase the value of his vote and be considered a convincing proof of his zeal for the tories we know not ; but certain it is that there was not such another rosette in all Nelthorpe ; and as he had unluckily and unconsciously got into the midst of the blue current, this token of extra zeal, for so it was looked on, seemed likely to lead him into difficulty. As long as the people found a possibility of moving forward they only looked before them ; but when their further advance was stopped by the density of the mass in front, and the chiming clocks gave warning that a whole quarter of an hour must still elapse ere the victor could be proclaimed, they began to look about at their neighbours in the laudable hope of finding something wherewith to amuse them-

selves in the intermediate time, and a source of amusement was soon found in Mr. Ashton's enormous purple cockade.

At first his immediate neighbours contented themselves with sly looks and mocking gibes and jests ; from these they proceeded to ruder demonstrations—shoves and thumps, and ugly names, till Mr. Ashton began to think that he should be left without even the poor defence of patience. The mocks and shoves in spite of his placid remonstrances grew ruder and ruder ; he was bade to go to the purples, in no very delicate or elegant terms, yet so closely hemmed in that to cross the street without assistance was impossible ; and the idea of calling on the purples within hearing for aid and protection never entered his imagination. He was thus rudely handled by the uncivil blues, who resented his presence among them with such an enormous purple cockade as an intended insult, his situation becoming every moment more disagreeable and dangerous, when he was hap-

pily espied by Robert, who, knowing the value of every vote, had gone to the inn at which he was in the habit of putting up to enquire the cause of his delay ; and having ascertained from his servant which course he had taken was now making his way up the principal street, those by whom it was occupied crowding together to let him pass on seeing the badge of a committee man. To look down on the crowd was the only chance of recognising his father, and for that purpose he ran up into the drawing-room of a house with whose inmates he was acquainted.

The bustle caused by the jostling of poor Mr. Ashton naturally attracted his attention ; and great was his joy at the prospect of bringing him up in time to record his vote, and yet some moments of that precious time were wasted in moralising on his father's situation.

As a partisan he was outrageous at the insolence of the blues—as a son he would

have felt anger at any insult offered to his parent—but as a lively, active young man, not all his filial duty could check a laugh at thus seeing his quiet father, quiet almost to quakerism, pushed to and fro as a large ball, his wonderful stock of patience still unexhausted.

“ He should have been here before and then this would not have happened,” was his first thought; his second was to extricate him from his perilous yet ludicrous predicament, and conduct him to the poll.

He was on the point of encouraging his father with a promise of succour, and then descending to head the purples in a determined dash for his rescue, when his gaze accidentally fell on Lord Fitz Elwyn and another gentleman, working their way slowly but securely up the blue line towards the square.

His eye kindled ;—such an opportunity was not to be lost. Here were grounds for charging his lordship, through his party, with being

the encourager of tumult, and this was enough for Robert, who never considered that should the charge be met by the viscount with his usual generosity and high feeling, it would only bring honor instead of shame on the head of his foe.

“Is it thus that the whigs treat their opponents, Lord Fitz Elwyn? Hundreds of unmannerly ruffians setting on one quiet man, a gentleman revered by all the county, and that too when on his way to give his vote? But that last is the reason; you would by violence prevent his voting. Aware that you must lose the election by fair means, you would win it by foul;—knowing the value of a single vote, you would hinder that vote from being given,” shouted Robert Ashton, adding as he saw that he had attracted his lordship’s attention, “I warn you that if a hair of my father’s head be hurt, or if you delay him till the closing of the poll, a statement of every circumstance shall be laid before the public,

and the parliament, and Viscount Fitz Elwyn be deprived of his seat. Form my good purples ! form on the instant ; and I will come down to head you in rescuing my father, whose vote, if we can save him from the savage blues, may turn the tide in our favor.”

“ Keep your men back, Mr. Robert Ashton ! keep them back if you would not have bloodshed,” answered Lord Fitz Elwyn in a clear and commanding tone ; understanding the whole in a moment, and judging from the muttering of those around him, who were now aware of the value of their before underrated visitor, that they would not be sorry under the excuse of a row to prevent the recording of his vote. “ Your appeal would have been quite as effective if more gently and courteously worded ; and Mr. Ashton might be sure of my assistance for his own sake. I will protect him with my life ; and should his vote be unhappily too late, which I trust will not be the case, I will yield my seat to my rival if that vote would have en-

titled him to it. Do you pass up your line to the head of the street; and I will guard your father up this side, but make no rush that may lead to violence; stir not passions already too warm, or the consequences must rest with you."

This proceeding was not at all in accordance with Robert's views, since it left the palm of honor to his enemy, for as such he counted him; yet there was no time for remonstrance or refusal; he too had heard the muttered threats of violence towards his father; but before he could answer, Lord Fitz Elwyn had sprung among the crowd towards Mr. Ashton, followed by his friend, who was strong and active as himself.

There were some moments of wavering to and fro among the mob—some more muttered threats; and then Robert saw his father hemmed in with foes as before, but linked arm in arm with the viscount and his friend. He bit his lip with vexation at his parent's owing his safety to the man he hated; but that safety

was not as yet assured, for some rude, ill-looking men still seemed inclined to outrage, if outrage alone could stop the important vote ; and their hasty exclamations that they should otherwise lose the election were beginning to gain followers to their opinion.

“ Listen to me, my good people,” said Lord Fitz Elwyn, taking off his hat, and speaking with mingled gentleness and resolution, whilst there was a hush among the multitude all eager to catch his words. “ You are all my friends—you all wish me well ; and I most heartily thank you for your good will, and your good services. I shall feel proud of becoming your representative ; but if that honor can only be won by violence and wrong I shall be ashamed to claim it, and you should be ashamed to grant it. We have a good cause, and deserve success, though we may not win it, do not let us stain it by injustice ! Let not our opponents have the right to tax us with evil ! You have all exercised your high privilege of

voting, or if you have not all votes now, I hope you will see prosperous days and gain that right by the next election; and it is not an Englishman's nature to deny an adversary, and such an adversary a similar privilege. Live, and let live ! vote, and let vote ! should be an Englishman's motto, and shall be ours. So make a path for me my good friends ; and let us show the purples that one of their voters may pass from one end of our line to the other without reproach or injury."

He was a perfect picture as he stood there—his hat off, the sun-beams resting on his noble brow and blackly waving hair—so animated—so full of life—every feature glowing with high and generous feeling. There was a minute's silence as he paused, all listening breathlessly to catch another word ; and then arose a murmur of applause that deepened into a mighty shout, which seemed to rend the skies. The voice of whig and tory, blue and purple, mingled in that admiring hurrah, which struck as

an arrow to the heart of Robert Ashton. He could not deny his foe esteem ; and it was that which galled him.

Five minutes since, and even their favourite candidate stood some chance of ill treatment, if not of being torn to pieces ; and now he was the admired of all admirers, his praise on the lips of all—his name the burden of their echoing shouts. Even the purples regretted among themselves that they could not have him for their second member ; and as to the blues, they would at that moment have followed him to death at the mere upholding of his finger.

They libel an English mob who say that they have no sympathy with high and generous feeling ; and that they cannot be as easily, nay more easily turned to good than evil. Woe to those who take advantage of distress and temporary excitement to lead them on to wrong ! who prate of sympathy, only to mislead, and use their eloquence to dress up sin in the guise of virtue, till the understandings of the simple

become confounded. There are few breasts which contain not some note of good, that it needs but touch with a skilful hand to bring forth harmony instead of discord.

Lord Fitz Elwyn's progress to the top of the street was more like the triumphant march of a conqueror than the mere passing of a youthful candidate towards the hustings, for all made way before him, and all gazed after him with admiring eyes. His kindly words, and his kindly smile, as he passed along to those whom he knew ; and his gracious requests and gracious thanks to those whom he did not, who stepped aside to leave him compressed, as they were, as large a space as possible, went far to increase his popularity. It was not the mere courtesy of an ambitious candidate—it was the kindness of a warm and feeling heart.

It was with some difficulty, though among his friends, and wearing his committee badge, that Robert could keep pace with Lord Fitz Elwyn ; but by strenuous exertions he did

succeed in joining him and his father at the end of the street.

“I see you are not used to crowds, and I am very sorry that you should have been so much inconvenienced. Make one push more, and you will be at the entrance of the polling booth,” said the viscount to Mr. Ashton, a half smile curling his lip as he remarked for the first time the staring purple cockade.

“I owe you many thanks,” began Mr. Ashton, wishing to pause for breath.

“There is no time for thanks now; you must push on or it will be too late,” observed Robert abruptly.

“You speak sagely; time wanes,” replied Lord Fitz Elwyn. “Do you coax the purples, whilst I persuade the blues to clear us a road through their dense ranks; the general approach is from the other side of the square, and concluding the polling to be over, the police I see are far less active than they were this morning.”

They did push on ; and by dint of entreaty, command, and hard labour, gained the entrance of the booth just as a messenger was seen making his way towards the same spot from another direction.

The crowd who made way for him gathered his news, and the shouts and counter shouts told that another vote had been given to the purples, making the numbers equal. Should this news be correct, Mr. Ashton's vote would insure victory to Mr. Fleetwood. Lord Fitz Elwyn's brow was clouded as he thought of this ; but he made no remark and followed Mr. Ashton, who was almost dragged into the booth by his impetuous son.

"A thousand, thousand thanks ! You are just in time !" cried Mr. Fleetwood, making way for him up to the polling clerk, who had scarcely recorded his vote ere the clocks of half the churches in Nelthorpe proclaimed the termination of the contest.

"He has lost it !" said Robert in a thrilling

tone, that proved a deeper feeling than that of the mere partisan.

“ Hurrah ! hurrah ! Ashton’s vote has given us the victory ! The tories have gained the day ; and you are our member Fleetwood ;” cried one of that gentleman’s eager friends.

“ Yes ; I owe you countless thanks, Mr. Ashton,” exclaimed the new member, his eyes dancing with joy, pressing Mr. Ashton’s hand with a force meant to proclaim the strength of his gratitude.

But Mr. Ashton did not receive these thanks in the spirit in which they were offered. Bewildered by the jostling of the crowd, and the haste with which he had been hurried forward, he had not clearly understood how much depended on his vote ; and it was only from Robert’s almost fiendish glance of triumph, and the ardent thanks of Fleetwood and his zealous friends, and the sudden turning away of Lord Fitz Elwyn that he fully comprehended how his voice had turned the scale ; and turned it too

against the very man, who had so lately defended him from the rudeness of the mob.

To his own generosity was Lord Fitz Elwyn indebted for defeat. The sympathy of Mr. Ashton was rather with the vanquished, than the victor.

“I am very sorry,” he began approaching the viscount.

“Oh ! never mind apologies for delay, since your vote has proved of such immense importance now,” exclaimed his son interrupting him.

“No, no ; you are the very prince of good fellows ! The king of trumps, the emperor of voters,” cried the rejoiced tories, crowding round him with vociferous thanks, congratulations, and warm shaking of hands ; whilst before he could free himself from these unwelcome demonstrations Lord Fitz Elwyn had left the booth.

“What a bold man to make your way singly through the blues, who nearly pulled you to

pieces I hear. I declare the purples shall give you three cheers as you go out," cried one.

"Your coming up at the critical moment was a splendid *coup de théâtre*! You are decidedly the hero of the election," cried another.

"I owe my victory entirely to you, Mr. Ashton; and hope you suffered no injury in making your way up," said Mr. Fleetwood shaking hands a second time.

"No wonder you were hustled. What could induce such a quiet man as you to sport such an immense cockade?" asked Mr. Hare.

"Is it immense? I never thought of that; my wife put it in," replied Mr. Ashton, for the first time remarking the waste of purple ribbon at his button hole.

"Ay, ay; it is the good old tory colour—we can't have too much of it," said another.

Mr. Ashton would have related Lord Fitz Elwyn's interference, and done justice to his generous gallantry; but he found it hopeless to endeavour to make himself heard or understood

amid the laughter at his large cockade, and the loud congratulations of the overjoyed tories, whose spirits naturally rose in proportion to their former depression. He would have told Lord Lindmoor how much he considered himself indebted to his son, but the earl turned away with a chilling bow ; and poor Mr. Ashton, deprived of all power of resistance, was condemned to hear himself proclaimed as the cause of the success of the purples, and charged with having withheld his vote to the last moment to make his zeal for their principles more striking.

It was of no use to comment on the want of fact and philosophy in such a belief ; it would have been in vain to assert and prove that in common sense no one vote could be considered of more importance than another, and that the first contributed to the result as much as the last ; the tories were determined to do high honor to Mr. Ashton, and he found himself, poor, quiet man, a hero *malgré lui*. His name

was honored with three loud cheers—the people declared their intention of bearing him on their shoulders to his inn—the tories nearly wrung off his hand to demonstrate their regard ; whilst the whigs, never suspecting that he was a hero *malgré lui*, looked on him coldly, if not reprov-ingly. For such a quiet man to make himself so conspicuous was in their eyes a proof of political favor.

Even Captain Wilder's greeting was constrained, and Edward's grave ; whilst some spoke openly of his injustice towards Lord Fitz Elwyn, and hinted a wish that the viscount had not interfered. Poor Mr. Ashton ! Every cold or scowling look—every hinted reproach wounded him deeply ; and he who so seldom saw or heard any thing passing round him, now appeared to have sight and hearing quick-ened to a painful sensitiveness. And all this was caused by his own indolent delay. Had he voted the day before no one would have thought any thing of it. Here was one of the

effects of procrastination. It was a severe lesson ; and he never forgot it.

As the final accounts from the other towns were not yet received, with only a bare majority, the victor and the vanquished might yet change places, or the numbers be equal ; but no : those accounts came in, and Mr. Fleetwood was declared the sitting member by a majority of one.

A majority of one !

The defeated party on such occasions always feel their defeat more keenly, and entertain more bitterness towards their adversaries ; and Mr. Ashton was again condemned to hear himself lauded and blamed ; praise and censure being, in the present instance, alike distressing.

“ I have not had time to thank you, Robert, yet. I owe you a great deal,” said Mr. Fleetwood, encountering his zealous committee man in the square.

“ Psha, Fleetwood ! never waste thanks on me ! No one pays gratitude now-a-days ; and

I am inclined to think no one deserves it. But how come you here? I thought you and Fitz Elwyn were to give a palaver to the electors."

"So we are; but I want to get speech of my servant first, as I may not have time afterwards."

"You will not have time now, for your man is a quarter of a mile off, mingled in with the blues; and has no idea of making his way in a crowd. What do you wish to say to him? Perhaps I may be able to reach him."

"I desire no concealment from such a zealous friend as yourself; and, of course, you must have guessed my feelings," replied Mr. Fleetwood colouring and embarrassed. "The fact is, I want him to gallop off with the promised bouquet to Miss Clare, which is left with the landlady of the White Hart. He was to have his horse ready saddled and be waiting here that I might speak to him; I should be vexed if Miss Clare heard of my victory from any other than my messenger."

“ I will bear your message,” exclaimed Robert, eagerly, a wild gleam coming into his eye as he spoke. “ I shall ride faster than Dick.”

“ A thousand thanks ! You are a real friend !” cried the grateful lover. “ But it is a long ride.”

“ Nothing to me. Any message ? I am off on the instant.”

“ Yes ; tell her—tell her—but no ; I will tell her all that myself, only say that her flower has been worn next my heart—that I attribute my triumph to her kind wishes ; and only prize the honor as it may win me greater favor in her sight.”

“ A very proper message for a newly elected member. I wonder what your constituents would say to your only prizing the honor as a cause for favor in a lady’s eyes !” said Robert with such bitter sarcasm in look and tone that Mr. Fleetwood’s cheeks rivalled in colour the crimson roses of his bouquet.

“ Nonsense, Robert ; you know I am a lover as well as an M. P., but if you do not like to take the message only say that I hope to see her to-morrow, and lay my laurels at her feet.”

“ Oh ! I will deliver every word, and tone—if I can. Then I shall have to offer my congratulations to the lover as well as the member I suppose.”

“ I hope so !”

The approach of a friend, to say that his presence was needed elsewhere, prevented more last messages.

“ You hope so ! And what are hopes ? The cheating dreams of fools and madmen ! And love !—What is love but a fraudulent bankrupt, making a show of much worth to win customers, and leaving its deluded creditors to endure the galling pangs of penury ? And friendship !—is not friendship a greater cheat than both ?”

Such were the thoughts that passed rapidly through Robert's mind, characterising the expression of his features, as he stood without moving where Fleetwood had left him.

"Are you ill, sir?" asked a compassionate bystander, struck with his look of agony.

"Ill? oh! no thank you: quite well—never better," answered Robert with a forced laugh, beginning to win his way through the crowd.

"May I trouble you to let me pass, Lord Fitz Elwyn; and to desire your friends to leave me a path," said Robert, encountering the viscount, who having heard that the disappointed blues were ripe for a row, urged thereunto by the taunts of the triumphant purples, had gone with a friend to coax them into good humour. "I should not ask your services a second time in one day, but that I go on a message to a lady. Mr. Fleetwood makes me the bearer of the splendid bouquet that is to proclaim his success to Miss Clare, in return

for the single flower of his colour which he received from her, and wore as her favor during the contest."

"Oh! certainly:—pray tell Miss Clare that I would on no account delay her messenger, when speeding on such an errand. Selwyn," addressing one of his followers, "will you see this gentleman beyond our men?" replied the viscount, meeting the speaker's look of malicious triumph with a proud and steady gaze.

"Thank you, my lord; your words shall be duly reported," replied Robert, passing on with a mock show of grateful courtesy, whilst the viscount hastened towards the hustings.

The palaver, as Robert Ashton had called it, took place according to immemorial custom; but we decline giving the speeches of the candidates and their friends: enough that they were reported at full length in the County Chronicle, and County Advertiser, which being of different politics, an eager seeker after truth by reading both may hope to arrive at a just

conclusion concerning the quantum of eloquence displayed therein. The partisans on both sides compared their respective favorites to Chatham, Burke, Fox, Pitt, Canning, and Sheridan; to say nothing of Brougham and Peel, Cicero and Demosthenes, whilst the more sober and peaceably inclined praised the one for repressing the triumph of his party, the other for soothing the irritation of his; both earnestly imploring their adherents to keep quiet and orderly.

There was no symptom of personal rivalry or rancour to be traced in the words of the two candidates; but on the contrary a chivalric courtesy; cold, and lofty perhaps, but still perfect in all its bearings, as far as it went; and if none but their most hot-headed followers considered them likely to eclipse the fame of Cicero or Demosthenes, all agreed that they had rarely heard more promising maiden speeches. If Lord Fitz Elwyn showed more fire and enthusiasm, carrying his listeners with

him, willy nilly; Mr. Fleetwood showed a greater knowledge of the interests and capabilities of the county, particularly its agricultural parts.

There was some rumour of a petition, since disqualifying two votes would displace the present triumphant member; but it was only a rumour, for Lord Lindmoor and his son were delicate as to putting their friends to further expence; and the latter stood so high in general estimation, that the opinion rose and strengthened, that on the death or resignation of the old member, whose health was very precarious, the viscount would be elected without opposition.

The earl expressed his disappointment more openly than his son; but it was clear that the viscount was deeply wounded, though he said little or nothing. Whilst speaking he showed no symptom of fatigue or indisposition, mind keeping the mastery over body; but when the

necessity of exertion was over, and he had returned to the hotel, the deadly paleness of his face, even to his very lips, alarmed his father and Captain Wilder, who accompanied him thither.

In answer to their anxious enquiries, he admitted himself to be ill, attributing it partly to over fatigue, and partly to a blow on the chest received whilst forcing his way through the crowd to the square.

“ This is Mr. Ashton’s doing !” thought Lord Lindmoor, as he gazed on the pallid features of his only son, so clearly bearing traces of pain, mental and bodily.

In his fond affection the anxious parent would have had medical advice, but to this Lord Fitz Elwyn strongly objected, persisting that rest and quiet would entirely restore him ; and to ensure him this it was settled that he should return to Lindmoor immediately, and be committed to his mother’s nursing,

whilst the earl remained at Nelthorpe to make all needful arrangements, and parting speeches to their friends and supporters, saying as little as possible about the viscount's indisposition, to avoid all chance of a row or a fuss.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT ASHTON gave less thought to the spoiling of his friend's steed, than the speedy delivery of his message ; and the poor horse had cause to rue belonging to so ardent a lover, blessed with so hot a friend. Lord Fitz Elwyn was defeated !—defeated partly through his endeavours. That for which he had so ardently longed—so heavily toiled was come to pass !—but was he happy ? Happy ? When did hatred and jealousy ever know happiness ?

Triumph gleamed in his eye, but there was no peace in his heart ; that was the seat of fiery passions—the arena of fierce and contending feelings.

“ Who has won ? ” demanded Mrs. Ashton, meeting her son in the park.

“ Fleetwood,” he shouted in reply, but made no pause.

Jealousy spurred him on, stifling the accusations of his as yet unhardened conscience. It was the work of a minute to spring from his smoking horse, and spring up the stairs, three steps at a time, never stopping to breathe till he stood at the door of the little room expressly appropriated to Cecil, and where a servant in the hall had informed him he should find her.

“ Victory ! Victory ! he has won ! ” exclaimed Robert, bursting into the apartment, concealing the bouquet behind him.

A sudden flashing of joy lit up Cecil’s heavy eye at the announcement ; she half rose from

her chair, and then sank down again with a murmured expression of thankfulness, the colour on her cheek flickering, like a flickering flame.

“ Yes, he has won ! I knew you would be rejoiced ; and he has made me the bearer of this bouquet, which I was to deliver with all speed as a token of conquest and gratitude for having been permitted to wear your favor,” continued Robert, standing before her with his fierce eye fixed full upon her, endeavouring to check the fury that would force its way.

The caustic irony of his tone at the moment passed unnoticed. Cecil only heard—Cecil only thought—he has won ! he has sent me this bouquet, to be delivered with all speed ! and her hand grasped the flowers with an eager, yet half timid joy.

But her eye had not discovered half its beauties, ere the frenzied laugh of its bearer caused her to look up, and involuntarily draw back with a sudden pang of fear.

“Ha! ha! ha! so this is woman’s consistency; grasping with trembling joy Tuesday what you declined on Thursday. Now thanking heaven for a success, which you pretended to deprecate not a week ago. Hurrah! for woman’s consistency! What a pity that the sender of the bouquet is not here to see how tenderly you look upon his gift. But you can tell him this. Fleetwood bade me say that he attributed his victory to your magic flower, worn next his heart; and that he should be here to-morrow to lay his honors at your feet, which were only precious from the hope that they would win him favor in your sight.”

“Mr. Fleetwood attribute his victory to my flower! lay his honors at my feet! What do you mean? I thought—I understood—” faltered the agitated girl, looking into his face with an eager gaze.

“What did you think and understand?” questioned Robert sarcastically. “Did not

you comprehend that Fleetwood had won the election and sent you the bouquet?"

"Fleetwood!" murmured Cecil, unconscious that her lips moved, whilst a sudden paleness overspread her features, and the flowers lately so firmly grasped fell from her hands, as though she had spied an asp amid their fragrant loveliness.

"Ha! here is another proof of woman's consistency: now casting away what was lately looked on with such doting eyes."

"I bade you tell Mr. Fleetwood that I desired not the bouquet," replied Cecil with as steady a voice as she could command, bending over her work, and trying to appear completely occupied with its progress.

"Then why look so dotingly on the flowers at first? Surely you could not have thought—you could not have understood—that they were sent by another—that another had gained the victory! I remember now I said that *he* had

won. Did you place for ~~he~~ some other name than Fleetwood?" questioned Robert, fixing his searching eyes upon her.

"You burst into my room so very boisterously, that I may well stand excused for being so much startled as not to understand your meaning," replied Cecil struggling to check and conceal the trembling of her fingers, that refused to guide the scissors.

"You have really a genius for explanation, Miss Clare; I know no one equal to you in that line. But I do not exactly see how my boisterous *entrée* can satisfactorily account for your burst of thankfulness, on hearing that he had won; or the delight with which you first gazed on the flowers."

"An election causes such dissensions between families and friends, that I might well rejoice at its termination; and the beauty of the bouquet might as naturally win my thoughtless admiration, having, as you know, an abso-

lute passion for flowers," answered Cecil with but little unsteadiness of tone, though she dared not raise her crimson cheek, blushing at the evasive words.

"Did I say you had a genius for explanation, Miss Clare? Poor meed of praise! You are the very genius of geniuses at an explanation. Neither Dr. Johnson, nor Dr. Walker, nor all the explainers of all the words, in all the languages, known and unknown, can be compared to you! You can only be rivalled by that Member of Parliament, of explaining memory, who made it clearly appear that he had never said what he had said. But now that you have so satisfactorily explained the past," and there was an ironical emphasis on the word satisfactorily. "I must entreat you to show more courtesy for the future, and not leave the bouquet I was at such pains to bring you to wither on the floor."

"Do with it as you will, since you deplore

its fate. You knew that it would bring me no pleasure, and after what I said the other day should have declined becoming its bearer."

"This is very ungrateful, Miss Clare; most ungrateful to me and Fleetwood. If you could tell how he has toiled to win those honors which are to be laid at your feet—gained only by one—yes only one, and that my father's vote, which would have been too late one minute later, and which was only recorded in time through my strenuous exertions, going into the crowd to look for him, you would overpower him with congratulations—me with thanks. Nor did my labours of love end there. To say nothing of galloping along the road at the risk of my neck to bring you the welcome intelligence, and true affection's offering, I had also to force my way through the crowd; but not unaided, I must admit, for the moment Lord Fitz Elwyn understood my errand he sent one of his party to clear a way for me through the

blues, bidding me tell you, that he should be very sorry to delay one bound on such an errand."

Cecil made no reply, her face was bowed so low that her forehead nearly touched the table; and the scissors instead of making a snip to the right, cut a fearful gash to the left.

"Am I to gain no thanks for my gallantry, Miss Clare? *Ainsi va le monde!* Woe waits on him who trusts to woman's gratitude. But surely you will cherish those lovely flowers? you have such a passion for flowers—solely on that account—of course."

"The errand on which they came has robbed them of all charms in my eyes; and you may keep them for your pains; I will have none of them," said Cecil putting them away with her foot, yet still without looking up.

"The errand on which they came! What! did you wish Lord Fitz Elwyn to win then?"

Cecil went on with her work in silence.

“ Did you wish Lord Fitz Elwyn to win ?” he demanded again with considerable vehemence.

“ I wished no honors to be laid at my feet ; besides, I am a whig, as you know,” she replied in a low voice, finding that he would be answered.

“ A whig !” exclaimed Robert with such bitter irony, such a fierce incredulity, that Cecil trembled more and more, “ The whig was defeated, and I did it !” he added with a look and tone of mocking triumph, yet more fearful.

Still Cecil continued silent ; and after gazing at her intently for some minutes he turned abruptly away, and paced the room with scowling brow, and gigantic strides.

Cecil shook like an aspen in every limb, but feared her unsteady steps would betray her weakness, and subject her to further insult if she attempted to leave the room. She would have willingly parted with years of life, alas !

what little happiness had life brought to her ! for the privilege of being alone at that instant, so utterly unable did she feel to contend with the malignant spirit before her, so much did she dread what a moment of greater feebleness, and she felt her strength was failing, might reveal. Any thing—every thing to disturb this fearful *tête-à-tête* ; but the bell was on the other side of the room ; and no one entered unsummoned.

After some minutes he again stopped abruptly before Cecil with a fresh change in his demeanour. The jealous fury before so hardly restrained was no longer checked, and yet he assumed a playfulness of tone and air belied by the scathing intensity of his gaze.

“ You are fond of snatches of old songs, Miss Clare ; I will give you a part of one that I fell in with the other day ; and you can set it to music if you will—

“ As I walked by myself,
I talked to myself,
And myself said to me ;
Cecil Clare loves Lord Fitz Elwyn.”

A half smothered cry of agony burst from the livid lips of Cecil, as she sank back fainting in her chair.

“ Good Heavens ! what have I done ? I have killed her—destroyed her, on whom I doted ! ” exclaimed the terrified Robert, struck to the heart by that painful cry, and the corpse-like look of his victim. “ Speak to me, Cecil, only one word ! Say you forgive me ; and I will be as your slave for the future, looking no look, breathing no word, that shall give you pain. Speak to me, even though in anger ; I cannot brook this horrid silence,” he continued frantic with fear, kneeling before her, and taking one of her cold hands in his.

The hand was not withdrawn, for the sufferer had not sufficient strength for that ; but he felt her shudder at his touch ; and this was the only sign of life she gave.

“ Oh ! Cecil, you hate me ! you shudder at my touch ! And I have killed you,” he exclaimed letting the cold hand that he had

taken drop, and clasping his own in wild despair.

“Hey day! What is the matter?” cried Mrs. Ashton, who had hurried home to hear the news, marvelling to see her son kneeling before the fainting Cecil, who really looked the corpse he at that moment believed her to be.

“Cecil is dead; and I have killed her,” replied her son in hollow accents.

“Killed her! How? Bless me! She has only fainted, I daresay. She has been very poorly all the last week, and my drops did not seem to do her much good. I suppose you bounced into the room, and so terrified her. Poor thing! Poor thing! she is very weak; and I should not wonder if she soon followed her mother to the grave. Call Hillyer to bring the hartshorn,” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, scratching Cecil’s delicate throat with her brooch in tearing open her habit shirt to give her air, chafing her hands, and loosening her belt, whilst she went on with her lamentations and

directions. “Do not stand there, Robert, staring so wildly, and wringing your hands, as if you really had killed her, and were to be hanged for the murder; but open the window, and ring the bell for Hillyer; she will soon come to again if you give your aid, and bring some water.”

Robert started from his trance of terror;—those last words had restored him to hope and energy. He threw up the window, as high as it would go—rang such a furious peal that not only Hillyer, but all the other maids, and some of the men came rushing into the apartment;—bringing a decanter of water from the nearest bed-room, would have dashed the whole of its contents over poor Cecil, had not his mother caught his arm in time to prevent her receiving more than a sixth part.

The shock partly revived her! she gasped for breath; but it was long ere she opened her eyes, and even then they wandered round the

room, glancing on all things seeing none, till they rested on Robert, who was gazing anxiously upon her. It was painful to meet that glazed, unspeculating eye, that saw but took no heed, the mind receiving no impression from the objects it beheld; but slowly and slowly—little, by little—step, by step, as it were, there came a consciousness of recent suffering, and of present pain, mingled with wonder at the cause; and then that consciousness deepened and deepened, till doubt gave place to certainty, and the torturing truth was distinctly traced by memory; then the eyes closed again with a wild look of agony, and a heart rending sigh. The secret—the cherished secret, which she had so long striven to conceal was known; and known to him, who would proclaim her as one loving, and not loved—won, but not wooed. Her spirits sank beneath the shame. Robert could bear no more—he was not a murderer—he had not killed her—

this was something ; but that look and sigh would have power to wring his heart for many, and many a day.

He rushed from the house bareheaded, into the thickest part of the wood, where no foot was likely to follow ; and there, throwing himself on the earth, he buried his face in the long damp grass which he unconsciously plucked up in handfuls in the intensity of his remorse. His rival had been defeated—his revenge on her who slighted his love had been sufficient to content the most obdurate. Was he happy? Had revenge on rival and mistress brought peace to his heart? When did the accomplishment of evil desires ever do this? Look at the dew on his aching brow—listen to his half smothered groans. Robert was called fitful and wayward, nay, sometimes funny; few guessed his innate energy of character—the intensity of suffering of which he was capable ;—his self-control in public only increased the bitterness of his pangs in private, for he had

hitherto sought rather to hide than to subdue.

Not an hour's rest did he get throughout that night; and though assured by his sister that Cecil was considerably better, and hoped to be quite well on the morrow, yet more than once did he creep with a noiseless step along the passage to listen at her door for her faint breathing, to be sure that she slept, quarrelling with the breeze as it swept through the wood that backed the house, because it interfered with his love-like longing. And yet the assurance of her speedy recovery was not the only assurance he had received that evening, for, in answer to a passionate entreaty for forgiveness, and promise of silence on all painful subjects for the future, contained in a note delivered by his sister, and so carefully worded as not to wound her delicacy, she had not only granted pardon; but consented to see him early in the morning and pronounce it in person.

Had she only consulted her own wishes she would have refused a private audience; but his appeal was too touching to be resisted by one, who knew so well the pangs of hopeless love.

She was seated in an easy chair by Mrs. Ashton's express command, when he entered her boudoir, and too fully occupied in subduing her own emotion to mark the timid step and humble air of him, who came to sue for her forgiveness. Her eyes were bent on her lap, for she did not venture to look up even when he stood before her. How could she meet his gaze who knew her painful secret?

“ Oh, Cecil, what an ashy lip, and look of suffering! What a change since yesterday! And this is my doing! What a wretch I was to act so cruelly! You can never forgive me—I dare not ask it. And it is not the first time either, that I have wounded that generous heart, and trampled on your gentle spirit. No, no: you must ever hate me—you can never

“forgive me,” cried the repentant Robert, speaking in a low, despairing tone.

“Yes, Robert, forgive and forget all. We will never speak of the past again; and you shall henceforward be to me as a dear brother,” faltered the agitated Cecil, holding out her hand, and motioning him to take a seat beside her.

“Bless you, dearest, best!” he exclaimed as he pressed the extended hand to his lips, and instead of taking a chair beside her, knelt on the cushion at her feet. “I will strive to be all you wish; but judge me not too hardly if I err again, for my fiery temper has been too long uncontrolled to be subdued at a word. No one else could forgive, as you have forgiven; and I deserve not such a generous return for my ungenerous cruelty. But if you knew what I have endured, suspecting you devoted to another!—perhaps you can imagine part, though so much more patient in enduring—if so, you may feel some pity.”

“ I do pity, truly—sincerely ; but do not let us refer to the past—it can only be painful.”

“ Nay, but I must refer to the past ; and Cecil, bear with me a little while ; I have no one else to whom I can speak of the withering anguish of the last few months. I was prejudiced against you by Skinner’s report—I believed you proud and mercenary, and worried by my mother’s fussing resolved to dislike you ; and for a time, maintained my resolve, savage that I was, in spite of Emma’s persuasions, and the gentleness you displayed in return for my rudeness, and your gratitude for any little attention. I tried to dislike you still, but your sweetness overcame my prejudice. I grew restless and wretched ;—wretched in your presence—wretched in your absence. I knew not the cause of that restlessness, and I dared not ask my heart. A sentence dropped by chance—the jealousy with which I observed your affection for Emma, at length revealed the truth. I loved as I never thought I could

have loved ; and at the same moment I felt convinced that you were devoted to another—not Edward, you only regarded him as a brother, though I envied him even that ; but some one whom you had known before we met, and I resolved to watch you closely—to criticise look and word and tone. You were suffering from some secret sorrow, though no one else suspected it, and I would find it out. It was to the alternate influence of love and jealousy that you must attribute my wayward mood. I watched all who approached you—I hated those who sought your love—I hated all on whom you smiled ; my jealousy found food in the veriest nothings. I suspected all of being my rivals ; but at last he came, the rival whom I had most cause to fear : and I felt—I knew, by a secret instinct, that I had met my foe. I resolved to cross him in every way—I tried to fathom his feelings—to account for his conduct—and for yours ;—but—”

“ Spare me ! in pity spare me ! you pro-

misgiving not to refer to the past," pleaded the trembling, blushing Cecil, interrupting him in his passionate relation.

"So very sensitive to a mere allusion. This very sensitiveness too fully proves the justice of my fears. Something has parted you;—I know not—I ask not what, only pleading for the remnant of affection, despised or at least unclaimed by another. Do not refuse me, Cecil. Give me a right to soothe your grief—to protect you from the slights of one, who merits not a love he is too proud to strive for."

"Do not ask it! do not be ungenerous and seek to found your happiness upon my misery. I only pray to go down to the grave in peace."

"Ah, Cecil, you hate me! I see it, though you will not say it:—and I deserve your hatred."

"No; I regard—I esteem you; but spare me further entreaty, which I am ill able to en-

dure. Be to me as a friend—a brother :—more you can never be.”

“ A brother—only a brother? Ah, Cecil, how shall I school my heart to that !” said Robert with a touching sadness, looking pleadingly into her face, then bowing his head on her hand till his brow rested on her lap, whilst bitter tears gushed forth and fell unrestrained.

“ Leave me, Robert, leave me, I cannot bear to see you thus ; and to linger here can do no good to either,” said the weeping Cecil, after some moments of silent sympathy.

“ You would send me from you in anger, Cecil.”

“ Not in anger ; but in pity. I cannot bear those tears.”

“ Tears !” he repeated in surprise. “ Ah, Cecil ! I was unconscious of this,” he added, as raising his face a tear fell on his hand. “ You do right to send me away ; you must

despise this feebleness. But you are weeping too—you pity more than you condemn me: in anger, or in penitence—in every mood, I cause you pain.”

“ I do not think of that ; but this indulgence weakens both, and I have need of all my strength.”

“ And I have taxed that strength so hardly. What have I not made you suffer ! How in my mad jealousy have I not sought to pain and injure him you love ! Nay shrink not, Cecil. I will speak no more of him ; but only this :—if I can never be his friend—yet, for your sake, I will no longer be his foe. And now farewell. Do not hate me, if you can help it, though my acts may seem to belie my words. I have professed friendship for Fleetwood, and must not be false to him, as to you ; my further exertions in his service can do no injury to his rival—and to mine. Heaven bless you, Cecil ! I am too selfish to wish you happy with

another ; but I entreat you, guard your health."

Before she could reply he had rushed from the room ; and was soon after on his way to Nelthorpe, in fulfilment of an engagement to meet some of the gentlemen forming Mr. Fleetwood's committee, concerning the payment of the election expences, and the arrangements for the charring, which was to take place on the succeeding day.

"Here is our new member come to enquire after your health," said Mrs. Ashton to Cecil about two hours later, throwing open the door to admit Mr. Fleetwood, who advanced eagerly towards Miss Clare, his eyes beaming with love and triumph.

His *empressement* nearly overset the barely recovered composure of his lady-love ; but the coldness with which she received his compliments scarcely damped his ardour ; he was resolved to hope and believe all that he wish-

ed ; and it required an absolute refusal to drive him from this resolution. Mrs. Ashton, without guessing his intention of learning his fate, favored his views by leaving the room in search of Emma, in accordance with her idea that, Cecil being engaged to Sir Thomas Willerton, Mr. Fleetwood might, if afforded opportunities, transfer his attentions to her eldest daughter.

“ I hope you received the bouquet safely,” began the new member as soon as his hostess was out of hearing. “ It was not as beautiful as I desired, but the best I could procure, though utterly unworthy of her to whom it was sent.”

“ I believe it was very beautiful, Mr. Fleetwood ; but my indisposition prevented my observing its loveliness. I only regret that you should have been at the trouble of sending it, when you must have had so many other things to think of.”

“ Amid all the bustle of the election you

were still my first thought," he replied, consoling himself for not seeing his flowers in the room by supposing that she had placed them in some favored spot, where no eye but hers could rest upon them.

Had he known that they had been trampled on at the time, and since forgotten, his hopes would have been less bright.

"I trust your thoughts were more profitably employed," answered Cecil, growing colder and colder—paler and paler every moment; for his words brought to her mind not only Robert's late emotion; but Fitz Elwyn's defeat.

"They could not be employed on any object so dear to me as yourself."

"I was early taught to distrust flatterers, Mr. Fleetwood;" replied Cecil severely, hoping to check a more open declaration.

"This is no flattery; it is only the simple truth," he exclaimed with increasing earnestness.

"I hope not, Mr. Fleetwood, for I should

be deeply pained to believe you sincere in this. However much flattered by your esteem, I neither deserve nor desire to be the first in your regard."

The gravity and decision with which this was said made him silent for some moments.

"You have not congratulated me on my success," he remarked when he next spoke, vexed at her coldness, yet still resolved to hope.

"You knew from the first that, having been brought up a whig, you could not command my sympathy."

"Not command—I would command nothing; but implore, entreat. Your flower has never left me—I prized it as a spell to ensure my victory—a pledge of success, whilst seeking to obtain a still more precious boon."

"That flower was taken, Mr. Fleetwood; it would never have been given," replied Cecil still more decidedly, crossing the room as she

spoke, and busying herself in arranging some books on the table.

It was no longer possible for the most hopeful lover to misunderstand the hopelessness of a further suit, at least at the present time. Her's was not the embarrassed coldness of timid love, fearing to seem to understand and consent too quickly, nor the coldness of a practised coquette, assumed to draw on a fuller declaration ; but the resolute coldness of a delicate and high minded woman, who, though grieved at inflicting pain, felt it just and generous at once to crush the hopes that could never be realised.

Mr. Fleetwood had been a hopeful—a very hopeful lover, for he had wilfully shut his eyes to her coldness from their first acquaintance, choosing to believe that such was her natural manner ; but he could deceive himself no longer ; and this rude awakening from a blissful dream was deeply felt. For some moments

he did not speak—he did not move ;—and the ruddy cheek paled to an ashy hue ; then came delusive hope again, with a soft and witching whisper. What cannot time effect ? She might be his if he urged her not too boldly now ;—she might not withstand his continued, silent devotion.

“ Your refusing to share in my triumph, Miss Clare, has robbed that triumph of its brightest glory in my eyes ; but I will not torment you further on the subject ; forgive me if I have already been too importunate. You will not deny me I trust the regard of a friend.”

“ Certainly not ; you have compelled my esteem,” replied Cecil, touched by his saddened tone, and forgetting for the moment in her generous sympathy with his present disappointment, whose rival he had so lately been ; but she had cause to repent the warmth with which she had spoken.

“ A thousand, thousand thanks !” he ex-

claimed with returning ardour. "If I only ask for your friendship now—hereafter, I may hope for more."

"More you can never have," said Cecil with a decision of manner, that left no doubt.

The re-entrance of Mrs. Ashton with Emma stopped further conversation on a subject so painful to Cecil ; and Mr. Fleetwood soon after took his leave having many engagements.

She could not refuse to shake hands as usual at parting, but she did it reluctantly ; the hand that pressed hers was the hand of him who had opposed and defeated Lord Fitz Elwyn. He had compelled her esteem, as she had said, for she had been prejudiced against him, but she could no longer find pleasure in his society. And yet what was—what could Lord Fitz Elwyn be to her ? When did the heart of loving woman solve such a question by the rule of reason ?

CHAPTER V.

“You are so much better, what say you to driving me over to Holdish Park to-morrow?” said Lady Lindmoor to her son as they were sitting together in her ladyship’s morning-room in the afternoon of the day succeeding the election. “You have not been there for some time; and Lord Barringham deserves, and may expect your thanks.”

“I paid them before I quitted Nelthorpe,” replied the viscount as briefly as possible, without raising his eyes from the newspaper.

“But you have not paid them to Lady Barbara, and she was nearly as active as her father.”

“Rather too active to suit my ideas of woman’s retiring delicacy,” observed his lordship decidedly.

“Nay, Frederick, that is rather ungrateful, considering that those exertions were in your behalf; a lover should not be so critical.”

“Let her lovers judge her ladyship’s conduct as they please! I am not one of the number.”

“I should be very sorry to believe you Frederick. She is rich, handsome, accomplished, and good tempered.”

“Add to these vain, frivolous, and cold-hearted,” remarked the viscount with a slight tinge of bitterness.

“I did not expect to hear such an addition to her catalogue of merits from you.”

“It is a painful subject for me to touch on, my dear mother; but our family motto is ‘*La vérité*,’ and I believe it is always the best plan

to meet a disagreeable subject half way, and discuss it in a straightforward manner," replied his lordship, throwing aside the paper, and with it the listless manner of the last few hours. "I know that the whole county has given me to Lady Barbara, and more than suspect that the Earl and Countess of Lindmoor, instead of forming a judgment of their own, have followed in the wake of others; but Lord Fitz Elwyn floats not down with the general current."

"I cannot deny that your father and myself desire your union with Lady Barbara," observed the countess colouring slightly.

"I am grieved to hear it, my dear mother," said her son approaching the table at which she was sitting. "When we were poor, you thought of your son's happiness; but now that we are rich you think only of his aggrandisement."

"Nay, Fitz Elwyn, this is an unkind reproach. Lady Barbara is neither ill-tempered,

nor ill-favored; but on the contrary admired by all."

"But not beloved by me."

"You were much with her at one time," remarked his mother a little reproachfully.

"True; restless and unhappy I thought to banish painful remembrances by lively society, and Lady Barbara aided my design, but with the clear understanding that it would be in vain to hope for more than the honor of walking, talking, and dancing with her courted ladyship. I am no stoic to be quite insensible to beauty; and she is handsome, and, if in the humour, can be amusing; but I was then only Captain Fitz Elwyn, and she too cold hearted and prudent to attach me, or become attached herself, and therefore there was nothing to dread in her society. The difference between a Viscount and a poor Captain of dragoons is of her finding out, and not mine; I stand to our original compact. We agreed to conjugate the verb *s'amuser* together; but not the verb *aimer*.

You have yourself accused me lately of shunning her society ; I wished to give no countenance to the reports, reported to me by every gossip."

"Whatever may have been her views in former days, I am convinced that a little more attention now would ensure success."

"Possibly ; but that was not in the bond ; and I will have my bond."

"I hope, Fitz Elwyn, you will not allow a feeling of pique to lose you a young, rich, and handsome bride, who would be so readily welcomed as a daughter by your parents."

"Call it pique if you please, my dear mother ; but rest assured that the viscount will never sue to her, who would have rejected the Captain had he made an offer. Lady Barbara is rich—why do you string more perfections together since that alone is all-sufficient ? Lady Barbara is rich—but I covet not riches."

"No, Fitz Elwyn ; not covet—you are too high minded for that ;—nor do we covet wealth ;—

but still it would be so acceptable, situated as you are."

"You do not covet wealth—only think it would be so acceptable! Ah! my dear mother, this sounds something like a definition—a distinction out of the dictionary of that gentleman, who is said to wear hoofs and horns by way of ornament; and I am sure you will allow no book of his a place in your library. And why would more wealth be so very acceptable? We were contented six months since with less than a fifth of our present income; if riches bring discontent and craving for more, let us give up our late inheritance."

"You forget, Frederick, that to our late inheritance is appended a title, which it requires a good income to maintain with proper dignity; a poor lord is a subject of jest to rich commoners. The landed property attached to the earldom though extensive, is far from profitable; since by the strictness of the entail we can cut

down but little timber; and the house and grounds are large, needing repair, and expensive attendance. Your father feels all this acutely, fearing to leave you with the show of wealth, but in reality distressed. Lady Barbara's sixty thousand pounds would enable you hereafter to maintain the title with becoming dignity."

"Maintain the title with becoming dignity!" repeated Fitz Elwyn his lip curling with contempt. Then his mood changing, he continued with a gentle earnestness that could not be heard unmoved. "Ah! mother, when you were Mrs. Fitz Elwyn, and had but eight hundred a year, you thought only of your son's happiness; but now that you are Lady Lindmoor, with five thousand per annum, as I said before you think more of his greatness and dignity. And what are greatness and dignity compared to happiness? Five thousand a year will not pay many contested elections, and I know my father is vexed that my friends are to pay for

mine ; for me, I think it the highest honor to have been selected as a fitting candidate, not for my wealth, but my character. Five thousand a year will not admit of gorgeous parties, or of gorgeous diamonds ; but my dear mother used to care for neither, prizing her husband and her son above the jewels of the Indies. It will furnish you with needful comforts and elegancies without stinting you in hospitality to your friends, though it may limit profusion to a crowd of idlers, and leave enough to wipe the tears from many eyes, my mother's favorite employment. It is not gold that gives dignity to rank, but virtue ; and I am vexed that my noble and high minded father should countenance the vulgar error of rating worth by riches—the parish overseer, or road surveyor could do no worse, and in them alone can be excusable. The Earl of Lindmoor needs not a splendid income to ensure esteem ; and his countess needs as little barbaric gold to gild her virtues and her charms ; all see them and all

feel them, who come near her," said her son taking his mother's hand, and pressing it to his lips with mingled pride and affection.

"I hope this flattery and philosophy are quite disinterested Frederick, not founded on any lingering feeling of regard for the proud merchant's prouder daughter," observed the countess, gratified by his affectionate words and caress, yet half annoyed at his repugnance to a union with Lady Barbara, knowing that her husband's mind was set upon it. "Nothing would induce your father to give his consent, particularly since the conduct of the Ashtons at the late election, and the daughter's elopement. I trust you will keep to your resolution of not giving any one the opportunity of accepting you with a title, who would have rejected you without one."

"I have no intention of breaking it my dear mother; and if I had, it would be—'Love's labour lost'—for the lady is engaged to another."

“I am very glad to hear it; I know some give her to Sir Thomas Willerton and some to Mr. Fleetwood,” exclaimed Lady Lindmoor.

The viscount turned with a sigh to the window.

“I fear my remarks have pained you; but it is better you should understand that we can never receive Miss Clare as a daughter,” said Lady Lindmoor gently, breaking the silence that had followed her last observation. “Her pride and vanity luring you on to make an offer;—then her insolent rejection:—her—”

“It is a painful subject, and we will converse on some other if you please, my dear mother,” replied Fitz Elwyn with a kindling cheek. “Her pride and vanity are in my opinion doubtful; for I have watched her narrowly and seen nothing of either, at least nothing of the latter, and little of the former, but towards myself. I cannot explain or defend her conduct—I can only forgive it; in short, I have tried in vain to hate or despise

her. But do not think from this confession of folly that I shall ever ask you and my father to receive her as a daughter, even were she not engaged to another, and worse than indifferent to me. I will never wed without your consent ; but in return you must cease to press me to a hateful union. I desire no increase to the income arising from my aunt's bequest ; my wants are moderate ; and I should be truly sorry to deprive my parents of any of the comforts or even luxuries attached to their state. The land at Lindmoor, though at present unproductive, may I am sure be considerably improved, and a few months hence I shall be ready to devote myself to its improvement ; in the meantime I hope you will persuade my father not to oppose my wish to travel."

"Travel, Frederick ! what is the cause of this sudden wish ?" said Lady Lindmoor vexed at the idea.

"Can you not guess ? Is it possible that you too have been deceived by my calm ex-

terior, which has gained me the *soubriquet* of the cold?" exclaimed her son with a sudden burst of feeling. "Do you take me for stone or iron, to think I can bear unmoved my defeat by a rival in a contested election; and the loss of the only woman I ever loved? Do you think I could stand calmly by and see her give her hand to another, and offer her congratulations too? But it is better that you should think this, than guess the maddening pangs that thrill my frame."

"Frederick, my dear Frederick! I had no idea—I entreat you,"—began his terrified mother, laying her hand affectionately on his shoulder, and looking anxiously into his face.

"I am calm, perfectly calm, my dear mother, if that is what you would entreat," he replied mastering his emotion with a powerful effort, though his lip quivered as he made the assertion. "But there are limits to all endurance, and I dare not linger here; you must let me traverse other lands—see other faces. Per-

suade my father to this—tell him why, if you will ; but never again name the subject to me. Any allusion to her unmans me—think then what I must endure in her presence ! But I hear a carriage, and am in no mood for gossip, so shall be off to my study ; and kissing away the tears that were streaming down his mother's cheeks, he rushed from the room, bidding his servant say, should the visit be to him, that he was not at home."

The visit was to him ; and the visitor resolved to take no denial.

" You may say what you will, Humphries, but I know from your manner that Lord Fitz Elwyn is at home," exclaimed Sir Thomas Willerton, passing the bowing, denying domestic, and taking his way direct to his friend's study.

" Willerton !" cried the startled viscount, as the baronet threw open the door.

" Yes, Willerton ; the happiest man alive ! Why don't you congratulate me, instead of

staring thus, and looking as pale as if I were a ghost, and not of this ‘too solid flesh?’” he continued in too high spirits to remark his friend’s depression.

“You gave me no time, and made such an unceremonious *entrée*, as to flutter my delicate nerves,” replied the viscount rallying. “You know how sincerely I desire your happiness.”

“To be sure I do of old, or I should not suspect it from your present manner. I am by no means affronted at your saying—‘not at home,’ knowing that such a saying could not have been intended for me.”

“Certainly not. I suppose I am to congratulate you on having defeated your uncle’s unworthy son.”

“Yes, completely. I have it under his own hand that his mother was not lawfully married—

‘By candle, by book and by bell,’

in return for which I pay him a decent annuity. The whole was planned by a worthless attor-

ney, who, for his own profit, persuaded the illegitimate son to dispute the property with the legitimate nephew. The young man is more weak than wicked ; and my rights fully established. But that was only a preliminary step to my present happiness, permitting me to play the open, ardent lover, which honor had before forbidden."

"Then you are going to make the offer at once," observed Fitz Elwyn quickly.

"Going to do it ! I have done it, to be sure : and been accepted. Could any thing else excuse my raptures ? There don't look so dull about it, man ; one would think I was going to be hanged instead of being married. I cannot think what has given you such a dislike to matrimony of late. Some months ago you raved so wildly of love, and a lover's bliss, that I expected to have been called on to play bridegroom's man at once ; and now you look as if you fancied me engulfed, or at least engulfing in a quicksand, without the hope of escape.

You do not mean to deny I hope that my bride is peerless ? the sweetest ! the loveliest and the best !”

“ Oh ! certainly not.”

“ Oh ! certainly not ;” repeated the baronet. “ Umph ! I don’t object to the brevity of the words, though I wish the tone had been a little less scornful ; but I believe the Ashton’s are in bad odour at Lindmoor just at present, so I must make allowances. You will attend the wedding : I should not think myself really married if you were not by my side to bear witness.”

“ If I should be in England, Willerton ; but I shall probably be abroad at the time.”

“ Abroad ! Why what in the name of all that is whimsical can you be going abroad for, Fitz Elwyn ?”

“ It is the best approved course for a rejected candidate ; a tour in such a case is *sélon les règles*,” replied the viscount speaking hurriedly and with much bitterness.

“Pooh! nonsense, Fitz Elwyn! If you had been rejected by your lady love and wished to avoid seeing her the bride of another it would be a different affair; but only losing a county election by one is no legitimate cause for a tour. Stay and outface the tories; and above all stay and sober my transports, for, in truth I am well nigh running wild with my happiness, which has only two drawbacks. The first, that I must set off for London immediately on particular business; the second, which I have only thought of since the last five minutes, the difficulty of deciding what my bride is to call me. It is very provoking that you, who being a viscount, do not require a euphonious christian name, should possess such an aristocratic one as Frederick, whilst I who, from being only a baronet, have my christian name always standing forward, as it were in *alto rilievo*, should have such a commonplace cognomen as Thomas. Thomas—Tommy—Tom. What shall she call me? Not Tom Fool—nor Tom

Noddy—whatever you may think about it, Viscount Fitz Elwyn.”

“ I was only thinking of Mad Tom.”

“ Wherein you resemble, dear, good, kind, Mrs. Ashton, who declared I was not in my right senses, and proposed giving me some of her famous drops.”

“ Dear, good, kind, Mrs. Ashton !” repeated his friend emphatically.

“ Yes : dear, good, kind, Mrs. Ashton, Fitz Elwyn, sneer as you may. I am her champion for life, since she has promised to expedite the wedding, which you must attend ; for she has set her heart upon it.”

“ Has she ? But ‘ on a bat’s back do I fly,’ towards Rome and Naples.”

“ Oh ! you are going thither—are you ? I should not wonder if such were to be our wedding tour, so do wait till after the ceremony, and then you can go with us, and the prettiest of the bridesmaids shall be invited to make the fourth, for your sake. My wife !—

what a delightful word !—will be enchanted at the arrangement.”

“ Will she ?” exclaimed Fitz Elwyn.

“ To be sure she will. Bless me ! man, what do you mean by asking the question in such an awful tone ? But I beg your pardon for this folly, Fitz ; I see you cannot get over this hateful election ; and I have a spite against Fleetwood myself for vexing you ; here is a capital plan for revenge. He has cut you out as a member—what say you to cutting him out as a lover, and persuading Cecil Clare to elope with you ?”

“ Thank you ; but I would by no means interfere with your better claim.”

“ Interfere with my better claim, indeed ! no, I trust not ; for, in good sooth, I should not like you for a rival ; but with all my madness I consider one wife quite as much as I can manage ; and am no dog in the manger to keep to myself what I cannot enjoy.”

“One wife! What do you mean, Willerton?” enquired Fitz Elwyn with startling eagerness, fixing his burning eyes on his friend as he waited for his answer.

“Mean! why you must be mad to ask the question; and you certainly do not look over sane. I mean that since Emma Ashton has consented to become Lady Willerton, I shall have great pleasure in bestowing Cecil Clare on the friend I love best in the world, and the only man who deserves her.”

“Emma Ashton! I thought—I fancied—that it was Cecil Clare,” stammered Lord Fitz Elwyn, grasping at the mantel-piece for support, with such a sudden change of expression, as must have revealed his secret had not the baronet’s own confusion prevented fair play to his penetration.

“Oh, no! it is Emma Ashton, who is to be my bride,” replied Sir Thomas colouring highly, and twirling his hat.

“What after all you said at Milford of Miss Clare? your transports? your determination that—”

“There! there it comes! I forgot what I should have to endure. Stop! stop, man; and don’t ‘prove yourself a tiresome bore, remembering all that you ought not,” exclaimed the baronet, flinging down his hat with a still higher colour. “There is no greater proof of a want of tact than reminding your friends of what they wish to forget; raking up old sayings to contrast them with new doings. Besides I thought you must have seen the change in the object of my devotion, and admired the generosity of your silence.”

“I was so little at Ashton Grove that my ignorance is not surprising; and you always spoke highly of Miss Clare.”

“So I do still; ay, and will to the latest hour of my existence,” exclaimed the baronet, interrupting him. “I esteem, I admire her quite as much if not more than ever; but my

love is Emma Ashton's. Cannot you understand the difference; and how it all came about? But no. I see you cannot; and indeed I do not quite understand it myself. I was in earnest in all I said at Milford; and at the close of the Archery meeting was resolved that Cecil Clare should be Lady Willerton, let who, or what would oppose it; but somehow or other this sudden and ardent affection faded away; not dying a violent death; but declining with a gradual decay, so gradual indeed that I still believed myself attached to the fair Cecil, till to my surprise I found that I was really, truly, and *bonâ fide* in love with the as fair Emma. There had been no quarrel—no disgust; Miss Clare had always met me with friendly warmth; but it was the very frankness of that warmth that prevented my advancing in love. She was always the same—always cordial—never timid and embarrassed; she seemed resolved that we should be friends, and nothing more. I scarcely ever saw her alone—Emma was always with

her, as I have since learnt at her particular request; and by some strange fatality, as it seemed, if I began to talk and walk with Miss Clare, I always ended by talking and walking with Miss Ashton, till at last this became a habit; and then—and then—really I cannot pretend to say how it happened, only this I know, that somehow or other, one odd day, I found myself, to my own infinite surprise, making Miss Clare the confidant of my affection for her friend, and so merciful was she in her raillery, that I did not blush more than a maiden of sixteen at her first offer; and now love her next to my own gentle, happy Emma. My cousin's claim obliged me to set off into Staffordshire; and as I considered myself bound in honor not to name my hopes to the lady herself, till I could tell what I had to offer, I left my cause in Miss Clare's hands, who soothed my fears, advanced my suit with Emma, and set my mind at rest this morning by a look and whisper, besides adroitly contriving to

secure me a *tête-à-tête* with my fair mistress, though suffering herself from a horrid headache, poor thing, and looking so wretchedly ill, that I was painfully struck with her appearance. There ; I think I have given you a very lucid explanation."

" Very lucid indeed ! about as clear as the waters of the upper pond, which we are just ridding of its mud," replied Fitz Elwyn with a smile. " You are quite sure that Miss Ashton is really the object of your constant love."

" To be sure I am. Now don't be provoking, Fitz ; I know I deserve to be laughed at, and therefore I daresay should not resent your mirth. I have not seen such a happy, mischievous smile on your face for ages."

" Happy !" repeated Fitz Elwyn all trace of smiles departed.

" Don't fall back into the doldrums, Fitz ; I did not mean that ; only laugh at some one else instead of me. I am sure I have acted very wisely ; Emma Ashton is much better

suited to me ; Miss Clare herself says this ; and I think from your cleared up brow that you are going to assert the same, and offer me more eloquent congratulations than you have yet vouchsafed."

"Congratulations as warm and eloquent as the heart of a true friend can devise, and his lips utter, Willerton," said Fitz Elwyn, shaking him heartily by the hand.

"That is like yourself, Fitz ! I know you again now, with that look of life and energy, instead of the gloomy eye and contracted brow that met me on my entrance, and all because Emma Ashton is to be my bride, and not Cecil Clare ! Your mutual dislike is unaccountable to me ; for she is a noble creature, the only woman, save my Emma, and you cannot have her ; worthy of becoming Lady Fitz Elwyn. It is a riddle past my finding out—a fault in you that is past my mending. But it is very provoking that you cannot be at the wedding,

and divide Mrs. Ashton's zealous endeavours to make every one comfortable."

"My plans are not definitively arranged; and it is possible that I may be able to attend," said the viscount in some confusion, which confusion again escaped the observation of his pre-occupied friend.

"That is a good fellow! I should feel a want of something even on my marriage day if you were not there. Join in our wedding tour, as I proposed, and play pretty to the prettiest bridesmaid. There, don't begin to assert and asseverate; I am no matchmaker, and shall not invite Miss Clare to become our travelling companion. In the first place you do not deserve such happiness; and in the next place I suppose Fleetwood would put his veto on the project, preferring to take her as bride in a wedding tour with him, as the good folks at Nelthorpe believe. To be M. P. and husband to Cecil Clare is too great felicity for any one mortal; but I

suppose it must be so, since I cannot spirit you up to enter the lists against him, and carry off the lady. I had not time to ask her about the rumour, or rather to question Emma, for Miss Clare is not a person whom I should presume to catechise on such a subject. There is a dignity about her that mingles respect with admiration. By the way, I also heard something about the Ashtons having behaved unhandsomely towards you at the election ; but I hope this is not true ; it is tiresome enough their having been against you ; there must be no coolness between us, Fitz Elwyn."

"Never, I trust, Willerton ! Mr. Robert Ashton, as you know, does not exactly rival a lamb in gentleness ; but I consider Hartley to have been the most to blame in the elopement ; and the poor misled girl the least ; and as to Mr. Ashton, I suspect his party transformed a love for procrastination, into a love for toryism, or a personal dislike to me ; at least so I am willing to believe, and will endeavour to

persuade my father to the same opinion ; at any rate, you may be certain of always being a welcome guest at Lindmoor."

"Thank you, Fitz ; I may put your hospitality to the test within the week ; for, as you may guess, I shall not dawdle with my business ; but return to Emma as soon as possible, to be assured again from her own lips of all I wish to hear, for it seems almost a dream my visit was so hurried ; and here have I been prating instead of departing :—I had no idea it was so late. Adieu, Fitz. Mind you are to be at the wedding ; and if you really will not cut out Fleetwood, as I said before, you shall select the travelling bridesmaid. But what nonsense am I talking, forgetting Lady Barbara, the rich, the beautiful, who is so ready to console you for the loss of what she did her utmost to secure, shaking hands with unwashed artisans, and kissing unwashed babes, to win you votes. Offer her my congratulations, and accept the same yourself ; and do not indulge in the blues

again on my departure. Your look is not half as bright as it was some five minutes since. But once more, good bye, I cannot stay to keep up your spirits ;” and away went the baronet as he himself had said, the happiest man alive.

“ Cut out Fleetwood ? No let him win her and wear her ! I am not to be wooed and then thrown off,” thought Lord Fitz Elwyn, drawing himself up till he looked like one of the proud knights in the old picture gallery.

What a lot of dignity some people waste on petty occasions ! And how very indignant they are apt to be about nothing when under the dominion of pride !

Cecil Clare had shown no symptom of wooing Lord Fitz Elwyn : from their first meeting at Alum Bay to the present moment her manner had been uniformly cold and distant ; and she could with as little justice be accused of throwing him off, only because the good people of Nelthorpe reported that Mr. Fleetwood intended to make her his bride ; but the vis-

count thought otherwise, and looked very proud, and very indignant as if deeply wounded ; and, begging his pardon, all for nothing.

In the evening came a note and parcel from Willerton, brought by the post-boy, 'who had driven the baronet to Harston. The parcel contained a book and some drawings for Emma, promised long before ; but which in his happiness he had forgotten to give her, accompanied by a note to Fitz Elwyn in which he requested him to deliver the drawings in person, as they were very delicate, and he was sure Emma would be pleased with the attention, as showing that he entertained no enmity against her family for any thing that had taken place during the election.

CHAPTER VI.

“NONSENSE, about delivering the parcel in person ! Humphries will prove as careful a carrier as the post-boy,” was the thought of Lord Fitz Elwyn over-night ; but the morning saw him set off across the fields in the direction of Ashton Grove with the said packet in his hand, the earl and countess both supposing that he was gone to inspect the workmen at the upper pond.

“ Good morning, my lord !” cried honest Flinter, sorely puzzled whether he ought to condole with him on his late defeat, or avoid the subject of the election, as carefully as he wished every one to avoid the subject of Purcell’s pigs.

“ Good morning, Flinter ; fine weather for the harvest,” replied his lordship kindly.

“ Yes, blessed weather, my lord ; better than we poor sinful men desearves. I do not know how it is, but I always feels what the parson says about the wickedness of man more in a fine harvest than at any other time, and thinks with shame how I have grumbled at the weather all the year before. God is very merciful to us, my lord ; and yet we are always a complaining, wanting more. It is not being rich, or a lord that will make one happy ; but a humble and contented heart. Lords don’t have all things turn out just as they like any more than other folks.”

“ Very true, Flinter.”

“ Aye, my lord, and people don’t all have their deserts in this world either, good or bad ; but the wicked flaunt away sometimes like the tall scarlet poppies in the corn, till the reaper comes and cuts them and casts them aside, just as it will be in the last day, my lord, as we read in the blessed bible. If things was as they should be in this world, you would have been our member ; and I am most mortal sorry that you lost ; and only by one too, and that is more provoking ! I was quite mad when I heard of it ; and I am sure master would not have been sorry if he had not got there in time. You see, my lord, I wears your colours still ; and so I will till arter to-day, though I was to meet all [the purples coming back from the procession. I got Miss Cecil to give it me just the same as she gave Master Edward ; for I overheard him thank her for his bow, when I was coming out of the study, where I had been to ask about the old cart horse that was taken ill.”

“ Did she give Mr. Edward Ashton his colours ? ” enquired Fitz Elwyn quickly.

“ To be sure she did, my lord ; but told him peticklar not to tell ; and there was not one in all the county as wished you to win more than she, though she said nothing to any body about it. Why her eyes looked as bright as the buttons on my best Sunday coat if I said you was like to get it.”

Fitz Elwyn longed to ask of the reported union with Mr. Fleetwood, but refrained from delicacy, checking even any expression of surprise and pleasure at Flinter’s words ; his eyes however, like Cecil’s, rivalled the buttons on the honest bailiff’s Sunday coat.

“ Thank you for your good wishes. The Ashton family are gone to the chairing I understand,” observed the viscount with assumed indifference after a moment’s pause.

“ Some of them, my lord, not all ; Miss Emma would not go because of Sir Thomas Willerton being your friend, nor Master Ed-

ward ; and master himself did not wish to go but missus made every body go as she could. I beg missus's pardon, and would not on no account wish to say any thing disrespectful of her ; but I am sartain sure if the devil was to give a raree show that she would be there, and that not out of any particular liking of the giver of the show ; but only because she have not got any bide still in her. She must always be a moving about ;—a fidgeting herself and every body else. Yet missus be a good woman too in the main too, though she do worry one horrible sometimes interfering about the farm. Wanting wheat arter barley !—was ever such a thing heard of ?”

The viscount gave a sickly smile without understanding why. Then Edward and Emma were the only members of the family left at home. Cecil was gone to grace Mr. Fleetwood's triumph. It was natural—it was to be expected—her wishing him success was only a fancy of

the stupid old bailiff's, who was always fancying fancies among young ladies and gentlemen.

It was very right and very natural that Cecil should be there. And what could it matter to him after he had been so scornfully rejected, and had just declared that nothing should induce him to make a second offer? Oh! it did not matter to him at all. She might go where she pleased—do what she pleased—wed whom she pleased;—it did not—it could not matter to him in the least. But though it was all very natural, and very right, that Cecil should grace Mr. Fleetwood's triumph; and though it did not matter in the least to him where she went, or what she did; yet somehow or other, as his friend Willerton had said, he felt vexed and indignant at her attending the chairing; and began to think that his delivering the parcel at Ashton Grove in person was all nonsense. Not of course that Cecil's presence or absence had any thing to do with his morning's resolution

of bearing the packet himself; but only on second thoughts it was taking trouble for nothing; and calling when Mr. and Mrs. Ashton were from home, which he had known by the way, a full half hour before, might look like resentment at the conduct of the latter! so as Flinter evidently knew of the baronet's engagement, he might as well be made the carrier of the precious parcel.

"I see by your smile Flinter, that you have heard of my friend Sir Thomas Willerton's happiness," said the viscount after another short pause, during which these thoughts had been passing in his mind, whilst the bailiff had been watching his countenance.

"Aye, Aye! my lord. I see a great deal more than people think. I knew which young lady he was a courting. And Sir Thomas Willerton is a happy man; for there is not a better nor sweeter tempered lady in all the county, no more scarce a prettier neither, unless its Miss Cecil, as I always calls her, for I took to her at

once, just as thoff she had been one of the family somehow. Some thinks Miss Sarah is the handsomest, but I don't; and Miss Cecil looks grander and more queen like."

"Willerton is a happy man," said the viscount and a sigh closed the sentence. "Here is a parcel for Miss Ashton, which he forgot to give her yesterday, and sent back to me last night from Harston, begging that I would take it myself, as the drawings which it contains should be handled carefully; but you can take charge of it, and that will save me the trouble of going on to the house, which would be useless now since Mr. Ashton is not at home."

"I had rather not take charge of it, my lord, if I may be so bold as to say so, for many reasons," answered Flinter with an expression of countenance that baffled the viscount's penetration to decipher. I am wanted desperate bad down at the West Meadow; and my hands are over rough for handling any thing delicate. Besides I might forget it when I was going

about, as them things aint much in my way, and lay it down by the hay rick, or in the cow house, or somewhere ; and then Miss Emma would be so vexed, and Missus would never let me hear the last of it. Master Edward and Miss Emma would be so glad to see you too ; and I am sure Master Edward worked for your lordship all the time of the election, as hard as a nigger ; and he might take it unkind, being so near the house as this, if you did not go on ; and so might Miss Emma too, you being Sir Thomas's peticklar friend. It ain't many steps if you cuts across to the right ; and so down the shrubbery, and into the sitting room, which is much your lordship's best way, for almost all the servants are off to the chairing ; and those left at home are very busy as I hears, cleaning or something ; and you might not get the bell answered ; so you had much better go that way my lord ; and I know Master Edward will be pleased, thinking it friendly ; and you can say, that I told you. And so begging pardon for

my boldness I wishes you good morning, my lord; for I must be off," added the bailiff, departing abruptly with a low bow, lest the viscount should rebel if allowed time for consideration.

"It is rather an odd proceeding, but Flinter must bear the blame," was the viscount's thought, as with a half smile at the bailiff's eccentricity he turned in the direction pointed out.

"Aye, I know'd he would go as I told him," said Flinter to himself, as he watched the viscount proceeding towards the house, peeping round the tree behind which he had ensconced himself for the purpose of observation, instead of going to the West Meadow, where he was wanted so desperate bad. "I knew how it would turn out, though he don't guess who he is a going to see. Not Miss Emma—nor Master Edward; for they are walked down to Captain Wilder's, and Master Edward won't come away in a hurry from

there I guesses. Ah ! there is something doing there, if it ain't done already ; a second wedding, or my name is not Thomas Flinter ; and if Miss Cecil is in the sitting room all alone as I left her not long since, I should not wonder if there was to be a third wedding. I do like weddings ; they makes people so merry ; and so did poor Bessy, though she died afore we were married poor thing ; but I always helps on a wedding for her sake. But then some people are so odd about these matters (gentlefolks in petiklar) that there is no knowing how to help them. Now I did not dare tell my lord that Miss Clare was in the sitting room, for I have often remarked that as sure as ever I told him that she was gone to the right, as sartain sure was he off to the left ; and yet I do believe all the time that he would have given his little finger, aye and his thumb too, to have been by her side. I suppose lords and ladies don't manage these things as we do ; may-hap it would be better if they did. If

gentlemen spoke plain out as I did to Bessy, when I said—‘ Bessy, my dear, will you take me for better, for worse,’ as the parson says, the young galls would know what to do, instead of which they stands about shilly, shally, speaking as no one can comprehend ; and then no wonder if the galls says no ; galls always do at first. There is a something crossed in their loves that I sees, though I can’t make out what it is ; and so can’t set it to rights ; but I hopes the viscount will set it to rights himself, now that I have given him the opportunity ; and I may as well keep near the house just to prevent people from interrupting them, if he should find Miss Cecil.”

Such was the termination of Flinter’s soliloquy as he followed the viscount at a distance which precluded his being observed.

The morning sitting room at Ashton Grove looked out on the lawn, and Lord Fitz Elwyn was on the point of stepping in at the open window, which was down to the ground, when

the sight of a female seated before a work-table at the other window, and at such an angle that he could mark her every movement without being himself observed, arrested his purpose.

Cecil Clare had not gone to grace Mr. Fleetwood's triumph. There she was alone in the sitting room just where Flinter had left her a short time before ; and his heart beat wildly at the sight. She was looking thin and wretched ; much altered since he had last beheld her, now some weeks, except at church, where her veil was always down, and her face averted. There was not a tint of the rose on her hollow cheek ; and her large dark eyes were dim and heavy ; her lips—those lips round which had formerly played such witching smiles—were then white and compressed, as if to bar the involuntary utterance of complaint. Hers was a look of sorrow not of triumph ; Fleetwood's victory was no source of joy to her.

She would have preferred remaining in her

own room, feeling ill fitted for society, but some household arrangements of Mrs. Ashton's, touching the change of curtains and chair covers, had driven her from its seclusion, a circumstance the less regretted as she knew that Edward and Emma would not return for some time, probably not till dinner; and she had given strict orders that no visitors were to be admitted should any call, which was not probable on the day of chairing.

It was this certainty of being alone and free from all chance of interruption that had caused the look of suffering, which had so struck and pained Fitz Elwyn.

Believing herself safe from all observation, she had allowed her thoughts to dwell on the past and the present till those thoughts had characterized her features with a touching sadness, tracing the history of the bitter pangs she had so struggled to conceal. Mrs. Ashton, who appeared to think with Watts (and I at

least will not pronounce her judgment wrong)

“ That Satan still for idle hands
Will find some work to do,”

was fond of taxing Cecil's good nature in repairing bracelets, collars, screens, &c. ; and had this morning given her a necklace with the entreaty that she would set it to rights for her.

There lay the necklace on the table before her untouched, unthought of, till the mind, shrinking from the torrent of painful recollections that came rushing over it, turned for relief to outward objects and mechanical occupations. Breaking off the painful train of thought with a deep sigh, she began threading her needle with a hurried motion, and a trembling hand, that showed how disturbing had been her reverie ; then, taking up the necklace, she set herself resolutely to repair it, determined to think no more. Alas ! for the determinations of a maiden in love.

Some beads were required to complete her work, and to procure these she opened a small

jewel box that stood before her. The beads she sought were not at the top. She raised the tray to look beneath; and all her resolutions not to think were broken on the instant. There lay the bracelet won at the archery; and beside it, on a thick bed of wool, a ring with two doves made of spun glass, one of those pretty trifles that are given to, or bought by the company, lured by puffs or entreaties to go and admire the skill of the spinner, and the ductility of the material.

It would have been held frail and worthless in the eyes of many; but what value cannot feeling confer on the meanest trifle! there was a period when Cecil would not have exchanged that brittle, worthless circlet of glass for the jeweled stomacher of Princess Esterhazy, and the diadems of all the reigning queens, and the sultan's harem besides: but time had brought some change to her feelings, and the first glance caught of that valueless bauble caused a shock and a shudder. Then she turned to the

bracelet, which she took from its resting place and held before her, gazing on it for some minutes with a fixed and steady gaze, the contraction on her lofty brow growing deeper and deeper, the curling of her colourless lip more marked and scornful. Tears, large glistening tears came into her eyes as she continued to gaze ; and there they stood restrained from falling by maidenly pride ;—not one rolled down her cheek—not one fell on the bracelet in her hand.

She did not attempt to clear her sight—she would not admit even to herself that her sight was dimmed ; so on she gazed through her blinding tears, thinking and feeling more than seeing. She needed not sight—every cameo on that hateful bauble was too deeply engraven on her mind by painful recollections ever to be forgotten.

At length her eyes rested more heedfully on one ;—it was a beautiful Ariadne ; she who had loved so truly, and followed him she loved from her father's land—her father's home—willing

to have no country and no home but his, whom she had loved and saved. Yet she, the trusting, the devoted, had been left desolate! with nothing to assuage her woe but the soft murmur of the sea that bore her faithless lover far away. It was a lovely face, and the artist with admirable skill had blended in its expression the hopes of the still trusting, loving heart, with the awakened feeling of doubt—the growing conviction of her desertion.

At first the features of the gazer told only of sorrow—hopeless, yet patient sorrow; but gradually there gathered a sterner expression, as she thought whose hand should have clasped that bracelet on her arm; and then the indignant blood rushed up to her temples, and she flung the hateful bauble on the floor with a sudden burst of passion, her lips wreathing into a scornful smile as it fell at her feet.

“There lies one token of false vows—another shall soon lie beside thee,” she exclaimed.

Her hand grasped the ring of brittle glass

with desperate energy;—she raised it on high—an instant more and it would have been dashed to the ground, and broken to atoms; but the doves caught her attention, and all her pride passed away at the sight. She saw before her, in her fancy, him who had placed it on her finger—she felt his touch—she heard his silver tones. Cecil was again the loving, trusting girl—such was the might of memory; and the ring, instead of being cast on the earth in scorn, was pressed to her lips as she murmured in strong emotion :—

“He is false who gave thee, but I cannot trample on his gift.”

“Not false, dear Cecil! but true and devoted as ever! Who could have made you think me false?” cried the agitated Fitz Elwyn, springing forwards at her words, and throwing himself at her feet, every feature glowing with love and hope.

A faint scream of mingled joy and surprise burst from the startled Cecil as their eyes met.

Then she thought of her woman's dignity, and tried to rise and withdraw her hand from his grasp—to bid him depart; but the passionate pleadings of affection were not to be heard unmoved by one who had pledged to him her maiden truth; her hands unconsciously lingered in his, as with crimson blushes and downcast eyes she listened to his vows of never changing regard.

“And now, dear Cecil, that I have again told my love, will you not bless me with the hope of a return? Will you not say, at least, that you regret the harsh—the cruel letter that drove me to despair?”

“Letter! I wrote no letter,” said Cecil, in surprise.

“Not with your own hand; but then you sanctioned what your father wrote.”

“What can you mean? I know of no letter from my father; and therefore could have sanctioned none.”

“Might I believe this, Cecil, how happy

would it make me; but I cannot be mistaken in your father's writing. I know it alas! too well; and his subsequent manner confirmed the impression conveyed by his words."

"There must have been some mistake in this," said Cecil for one moment raising her eyes to his. "When we parted at the glass spinner's rooms your last words were —"

"But not my first, sweet Cecil, they did not offend you—you did not think them too presumptuous at the time," said Fitz Elwyn, interrupting her.

"We will speak of your last words first," replied Cecil softly, looking down with a deeper blush. "You said we should meet again at Mrs. Pendril's fête—yet you were not there; but were seen driving a young lady in your stanhope, on the Everton road, thus proving that no military duty detained you from keeping your word."

"The married daughter of my father's oldest friend to whom he is so highly indebted. I

hoped my letter mentioning the unlooked for arrival of himself and family, and containing an open declaration of my love, with a lover's passionate pleading for a return, would have satisfied you of my desire to keep the engagement, though it could not console me for being compelled to break it. Was it pique then that dictated your answer? Could you believe me cold or fickle after my declaration at the glass spinner's, when, the attention of the rest of the party being fully occupied, I found a moment to reveal my hopes?"

"I never received that letter."

"Is it possible? my servant gave it to the butler."

"It was never delivered to me. And yet you say you had an answer."

"Yes, from your father, purporting to be written by your desire; taxing me with presumption in seeking your hand, and assuring me that he and you had higher views than a mere Captain of Dragoons."

"I knew nothing of this; and you should not have imagined that I could sanction such a letter," replied Cecil proudly, hurt at his readiness to believe her capable of mercenary, or ambitious projects.

"Do not blame me for this, dear Cecil. If you could tell the agony that letter caused, you would pity not condemn me. When my anger had somewhat subsided, for anger mingled with my grief, my pride gave place to love; and I resolved to believe that your wishes had not been consulted by the writer of that insulting letter. I wrote to you again; and to make sure, my servant delivered this second letter into the hands of your own maid; but the ensuing day it was returned in an envelope, containing a few lines from Mr. Clare, stating that your resolution remained unaltered; and that you must now decline all further acquaintance, as well as correspondence. The terms of rejection were too galling to allow of my making any further attempt to move you; and as I met

you no where during the few days that my regiment remained in the neighbourhood, I had no means of contrasting your manner with your words."

"Neither of your letters reached me, and their answers were returned without my knowledge; but I can now understand the then unintelligible self-reproaches of Taylor, when during her illness I took the nurse's place for a time by her bed side. She muttered something, which I could not distinctly catch, about a letter withheld and secrecy; but I thought her still delirious. I remember also having a slight cold at the time, and being in consequence forbidden by my father to leave the house, who even talked of change of air. When I again went out you were gone to the south with your troop."

"Then you acquit me of all blame, dear Cecil."

"I blame myself for blaming you," replied the blushing girl with a frankness that made

her still dearer to the heart of the ardent lover, who was thereby encouraged to greater boldness.

"May I not hope then, Cecil, dearest, best, that had those letters reached you the answers would have been different? Do not say, no?" he pleaded, seeing that she hesitated. "My happiness hangs on your words."

"I will not say—no," she answered softly, trembling and looking down.

"Bless you! my Cecil, for this noble candour," exclaimed the enraptured Fitz Elwyn. "No one shall part us now. Who was the cruel foe who parted us before? I have cause to hate—"

"No, no: do not hate him," cried Cecil earnestly, her blushes gone and her cheek turning to a deadly white. "It must have been my father—it could have been no other; my mother esteemed you highly. Satisfied with the many proofs of my dear father's fond affection, I never suspected, what I have since

learnt from the malicious remarks of strangers, that he sought a splendid alliance for his child ; I only thought he sought my happiness. Alas ! Alas ! how little did he think that she whom he desired should wear a coronet, would in so short a space become an orphan and a beggar : houseless—friendless ! He is gone now, oh ! let me love him still !”

“ I will not hate him for your sake, sweet love, but judge him kindly. Let us talk of other things,” said Fitz Elwyn soothingly, respecting a daughter’s feelings, and anxious to spare her all painful emotion. “ I must have more explanations, and more confessions,” he added gaily, “ why did you meet me as a stranger at Alum Bay, since those letters did not speak your sentiments ?”

“ Nay, my lord, that was your choice not mine ; and I can call Sir Thomas Willerton to bear witness against you. You refused to introduce him to me on the plea of non-acquaintance. Do not deny it :—I overheard him say

so," answered Cecil, controlling her emotion, and endeavouring to reply with a gaiety equal to his own.

"That was Willerton's mistake; he merely inferred that we were strangers, from my declining to introduce him, pettishly, I admit; for his light joyous mood jarred on my deeper feelings. I had those letters declining all further acquaintance to excuse me; but one word from you would have brought me to your feet again."

"That word, suffer what I would, should never have been spoken. Had not your sudden appearance, and abrupt declaration [of unchanged regard surprised me into a confession, my long hidden secret would have remained unknown; and my manner continued cold and formal. I was the reputed heiress of thousands—some thought of millions, when you first wooed; but when we met at Alum Bay you were rich, and I a beggar; you the son of an earl, and I but the daughter of a ruined mer-

chant; and I had lately learnt from the Fords how the world looked upon me. Was it for me to dispute your assertion that we were strangers? to remind you by look or word of a time when you had sought to be more even than a friend? Besides, before quitting Ashton Grove I was assured of your engagement to another, your equal in rank and fortune. You were not as you had promised at Mrs. Pendril's fête—you left the country without any explanation. What could I suppose, but that some rumour of my father's misfortunes had reached you, ere they were known to himself, and that you had transferred your attentions to one, who stood high in the world's estimation?"

"And did you—could you believe this?" asked Fitz Elwyn reproachfully.

"I tried to believe it," replied Cecil looking down.

"But you could not succeed, Cecil? Say this—say that in spite of my fancied estrange-

ment and falsehood—my selfish, cruel coldness, for such it must have seemed, you loved me still. Will you not say this, love?”

Cecil was silent; but she did not chide him, when he interpreted that silence as he wished, and thanked her accordingly.

“Willerton has been the unconscious cause of misery to both,” he continued. “That very evening he declared his happiness to be so entirely dependant on winning your hand, that though rather incredulous as to the endurance of such a sudden passion, I was checked in my intentions of an explanation; and your manner towards him confirmed me in my silence and reserve. To save myself from the pangs of jealousy, and the temptation to supplant my friend, I shunned your society as much as possible; and till yesterday believed you to be the object of his attachment, whilst he still imagines me prepossessed against you from the general coldness of my demeanour. I now find that you uniformly checked the develop-

ment of any feeling warmer than friendship. I have been miserable, when I might have been happy ; and will not assert that pride may not have ruled me as much as reason. We have been playing at cross purposes, when one word—one look might have set us straight. And this bracelet too," he continued taking it from the ground. "You must have seen my eagerness to win the prize, jealous that any other should clasp it on your arm ; and yet you permitted another to deprive me of the pleasure of bestowing it on you, which I had so earnestly sought."

"I understood from Sir Thomas Willerton that it was on Lady Barbara's arm you desired to clasp the bracelet ; and it was not for me to dispute your wishes on that point."

"Another misconception of Willerton's. I only submitted reluctantly to the transfer to gratify him ; and, according to his statement—you. Lady Barbara Hetherton neither is, nor ever has been more to me than a handsome

woman of fashion; pleasant enough for an hour, but not one with whom I would pass my life. Robbed before of my privilege—I claim it now. Nay, sweet one, you shall not deny me,” he added with a lover’s playful peremptoriness, retaining the trembling hand till the bracelet was clasped above it. “And this ring too—you must let me replace it there, where I fitted it so many months ago; and you must not move it either, my own Cecil, let what will come to pass, till I redeem it with the magic golden circlet that makes you mine for ever. Promise me this, love; nay, do not look so doubtingly; promise me this, and I will be the most patient and submissive of lovers.”

“Who will stand surety for your patience and submission?” said the blushing Cecil, with one of the bright smiles of her brighter days. Then the smile suddenly passed; and she added in a doubtful tone; “but Lord Lindmoor and the Countess—what will they say? I am poor now, and I have heard that

they wish you to wed another—to wed with wealth.”

Fitz Elwyn started, and a cloud overshadowed his radiant hopes. Her words recalled him from the blissful present to the forbidding past—the doubtful future. Not four and twenty hours since his mother had declared that nothing would induce the earl to consent to his union with the proud merchant’s prouder daughter; and he had assured the countess that nothing would induce him to make a second offer; yet now he was the accepted lover of Cecil Clare. What would his father say? what would his mother think? He should have thought of this before.

Cecil marked his sudden change; and her own manner changed as suddenly. Her glowing blushes died away, ‘as she withdrew her hand from his. Her voice was low but steady; not the voice of one who did not feel, but of one who could, and would command her feelings.

"Do not attempt in fancied kindness to deceive me—do not attempt to deceive yourself: I see by your manner that my doubts—my fears if you will—are not misplaced. Hurried away by a sudden impulse you have acted imprudently; but there is yet time to repair that imprudence. You are an only child, and it would be cruel to cross the wishes of such affectionate parents. Forget all that has passed; and for the future think of me only as a friend. Beggar as I am, I was to blame in permitting you to indulge in other hopes. I give you back your vows; and with them my most earnest prayers for your future happiness."

"No, Cecil, no; you cannot give them back if you would; they are registered in heaven. This is a most cruel generosity," exclaimed Fitz Elwyn passionately, recovering from his momentary gloom. "Do you not love me, Cecil?" he enquired reproachfully.

"I seek your happiness, and that—"

"Can only be secured by a union with you," he added closing the sentence. "Dismiss these doubts, dear love ; blessed with your affection, all other obstacles will soon be overcome. I will not say that at the present moment my parents would select you from all the world to become my bride, for they believe you acquiesced in those hateful letters ; but when they have heard my explanations they will receive you gladly. Do not doubt me," he added seeing that she still looked mistrustful ; and so powerfully did he plead for belief that Cecil no longer feared, but allowed him to indulge in all a lover's hopes.

He would speak to his parents that night ; and they should come on the morrow to give their sanction to his claims. He saw—he would see nothing that should cloud their felicity.

"Umph ! It is all right, as I thought it would be," muttered Flinter to himself with a triumphant chuckle, as peeping cautiously into

the sitting-room, unobserved by its inmates, he saw Lord Fitz Elwyn seated beside Cecil Clare, looking on her as only lovers look when vowing undying affection, and all that sort of thing. "Yes, yes ; there will be a third wedding ; and it is I, old stupid, churlish, Thomas Flinter who have brought it about ; and missus have not an inkling of the matter, though she purtends to know every thing ;" and again the honest bailiff chuckled more triumphantly than before, missus's not having an inkling of the matter, seeming the most glorious part of the victory.

The lovers did not separate till startled by the dressing bell.

"What is this ?" asked Edward on returning from his visit with Emma, taking up Willerton's packet from the carpet, where Fitz Elwyn had unconsciously let it fall, and thoughtlessly allowed it to remain.

"I do not know," replied Cecil briefly.

“Who could have brought it?” enquired Emma tearing open the cover, so as not to destroy one single letter of the baronet’s tracing.

“Perhaps Lord Fitz Elwyn,” said Cecil in a very low voice, looking most pertinaciously out of the window.

“I think he might have placed it on the table, instead of throwing it on the floor,” remarked Emma pettishly, indignant at such treatment of a parcel from her lover.

“I suspect he was thinking of something far more important in his eyes,” observed Edward archly, for a fellow feeling not only makes us ‘wondrous kind;’ but wondrous knowing too. “I do not ask any questions, Cecil, though I am quite in the dark; nor will I give a hint to others; but this I will say that I know not Fitz Elwyn’s equal nor any woman more worthy of him than yourself.”

“Why what is all this about?” asked Emma

in amazement, having shared in the baronet's belief of a mutual dislike between the viscount and her friend.

"You are a simpleton, Emma. Do you suppose that no one can have a lover but yourself?" observed her laughing brother.

"Oh! no, I know better than that from Helen Wilder," replied his sister with a mischievous look, which silenced his raillery. "But you Cecil—"

"Am as happy as yourself, dear Emma; so come and dress," said Cecil, placing her arm affectionately within hers, and carrying her off.

CHAPTER VII.

“FROM Lord Lindmoor, sir ; no answer,” said the servant on the following morning presenting a letter to Mr. Ashton, who, after ascertaining that it contained an enclosure with a few lines in the envelope, laid it quietly beside him on the breakfast table.

“A letter from the Earl of Lindmoor so early in the morning ! Dear me, what can it be about ? Do pray open it,” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton in a prodigious fuss.

"There will be plenty of time, when I have finished my breakfast," replied her husband with most provoking patience.

"That is just like you, Mr. Ashton; you never will do any thing at once; always for waiting. I should not wonder if it were of great importance. Oh, Cecil! what are you at?" screamed Mrs. Ashton, interrupted in her conjugal lecture by the strange proceedings of her guest. "I handed my cup for a little more cream; and you have poured in half the contents of the mustard pot."

"Have I?" stammered poor Cecil.

The discordant scream—the ludicrous dismay of Mrs. Ashton—and the simple reply of the confused culprit, were irresistible. Charles was in fits of laughter—all Edward's and Emma's sympathy for the delinquent could not entirely check their mirth; and even quiet Mr. Ashton was surprised into a sly smile. Robert alone sat silent and grave, whilst a heavy frown was gathering on his brow. Cecil felt that his eye

was on her, and ventured one hasty look, a look bespeaking his sympathy for her, and speaking hers for him.

She had wished him to know of her late explanation with the viscount from herself; but this, his late return the night before, and tardy rising had prevented. She saw that he guessed the truth, and was deeply pained. And what was the truth? A letter with an enclosure to Mr. Ashton from the Earl of Lindmoor, instead of a note or visit to herself from Lord Fitz Elwyn, as he had promised. What was she to think? What might she not have to fear?

“You are in love, Cecil. I am sure you are in love,” cried Charles, relapsing into a second fit of merriment.

“Ah! I daresay that is it,” observed Mrs. Ashton, her thoughts again recurring to Mr. Fleetwood, since the baronet was to have Emma. “Our new member looked uncommonly well yesterday, I can tell you; and bowed and spoke most gracefully, though he was

dreadfully disappointed at your absence. But how wofully pale you are looking; and just now you were as red as a tiger-flower. Never mind about my tea, my dear, Emma has set it all to rights again; and I did not mean to say any thing to vex you. But you are taking no breakfast; and your hand is shaking like an old man's of seventy. You are sadly nervous, I must take you in charge again. This election has kept me in such a bustle that I have not had time to think of any thing. And bless me, Robert, you look as white as Cecil, and eat no more. What is the matter with you all?"

"If you had had such hard work during the election, and been up as late last night as I was, you would look pale too, my dear mother; and as for Cecil, depend upon it she has taken too many of your drops. I have no opinion of their efficacy; and always said you would dose her to death."

"They are excellent drops. They cured Richard Sims, and Betty Prosser, after they

had been given over by the doctor ; but you never will hear reason, Robert. These drops—” and on went Mrs. Ashton lauding her favorite specific as her son had expected, thus saving him and Cecil from further observation.

“ I must claim your assistance Cecil, to solve a difficult passage in Dante,” said Mr. Ashton, rising to leave the breakfast table before the conclusion of the panegyric on the drops.

“ I will do my best,” replied Cecil following her host into his study with faltering steps.

“ Take a seat, Cecil ; for in spite of the drops you are not very strong,” said Mr. Ashton with a kindly smile, placing her in his own arm chair.

“ I daresay you guess my purpose in bringing you into my study. Here is a letter from Lord Lindmoor, which he requests me to deliver to you, adding that he has no doubt you will inform me of its purport. You can read it whilst I arrange these books,” he continued turning away as he concluded that she might

feel herself free from observation, some hints (during a morning's stroll from Flinter) who could not retain his triumph at the success of his plot, and the depth of his penetration, having placed him *au courant du jour*.

A deep sigh from Cecil as she concluded the perusal of the letter recalled him to her side.

"I fear the contents are not what you hoped," he remarked with a father's feeling, as he gazed on her pallid features, and the convulsive working of her lips. "I would not force myself on your confidence, my dear Cecil, but your poor mother bequeathed you to my care; and I think you do not doubt my wish to perform all the duties of a guardian."

"I have already received more kindness from you and yours, Mr. Ashton, than I can ever repay, and have no desire for concealment," answered Cecil placing the letter in his hands.

Its contents explained her emotion; the earl declined the connection for his son, on the plea of her poverty, and the conduct of the Ashtons

during the election. The politeness of the terms in which this rejection was conveyed left no room for offence ; and the decided tone of that rejection left no hope of a future change.

A title he said required wealth for its support, which his son had not, and therefore must seek ; and the determined part taken by the Ashtons against that son at the election, must make a marriage with one so closely connected with them a source of constant embarrassment. She had his best wishes for her future happiness.

“ He was too sanguine yesterday, and I should have known it. To-day he acquiesces in his father’s decision, as his silence proves,” was the thought of the half fainting Cecil.

She looked on the ring with its twining doves, and remembered his vows of unchanging regard ;—his protestations that nothing should prevent their union. Had he so soon forgotten those vows ? Was his duty as a son to render void so immediately the protestations of the

lover? Scarcely twelve hours passed, and cooled so soon? Had she been only cheated into happiness for a while to be thrown back into a deeper woe? Was he fickle and false? No, no; shame upon her for the suspicion! Perhaps he was pleading even now—at least he would call or send. But had he loved as she believed, would he not have called or sent before, to soften the earl's refusal?

"Rely on me, dear Cecil; believe that I will do all that a father should do," said Mr. Ashton, sitting down beside her, and taking her cold hand in his.

"I cannot—do not doubt your kindness," answered Cecil starting at the voice, soothing and pitying as it was, which had thus disturbed her train of painful thought.

"But you must tell me all, my child; or I cannot judge how best to act."

Tell him all! Poor Cecil shuddered at the bare idea. How should she tell the ardent

vows of former times, so strongly contrasted by the apparent coolness of to-day ?

The entrance of Emma precluded reply.

“ Here is a letter for you, dear Cecil ; and I think it brings good news,” whispered the affectionate girl, as she bent down to kiss the cold, white brow of her friend.

Cecil’s glance of joy, as she recognised Fitz Elwyn’s writing, amply repaid her. But that gleam of joy was succeeded by a pang of disappointment. Why had he not come himself ? Her doom would have been lightened if learnt from him.

She tore open the note with trembling hands, and her eyes ran hastily over the contents. A bright glow came on her cheek as she read it over again ; a second perusal being still more satisfactory than a first.

It was dated the previous evening, and ought to have reached her long before the letter of the earl ; but had been lying forgotten

many hours in the waistcoat pocket of the foot-boy.

"He is not changed ! we shall yet be happy !" thought Cecil as she turned with glistening eyes to Mr. Ashton, in the first impulse of her joy holding out the letter, then withdrawing it with a deeper blush, yet finally leaving it in his hands as a justification of his lordship and herself ; but keeping her eyes upon him the while he read it, and reclaiming it the moment he had concluded its perusal, though sadly confused by his smile so arch, and yet so quiet.

The viscount had been called away the preceding evening to attend the deathbed, as it was supposed, of his old tutor, to whom he was much attached, and his letter was in consequence short and hurried ; but still every line was full of the most generous and devoted affection. He admitted that his parents had raised more objections than he had anticipated ; yet he spoke not only hopefully, but decidedly

of overcoming all those objections on his return, imploring her to feel no doubt on the subject; but to rely on the strength of his attachment, which neither time nor circumstances could weaken or destroy. He would wed her or none. The letter closed with entreaties that she would be careful of her health for his sake; and some loverlike prettiness of how long the hours would seem till he should look upon her face again.

As a proof of his unchanged regard this was very decisive, and very delightful, and at first she thought of nothing else; but still there was the admitted fact that his parents objected, and his very protestations of unchanging regard in all times and circumstances—his declarations that he would never wed another, all seemed to her sensitive delicacy, when her thoughts were once turned to the subject, to hint a doubt of ever overcoming his father's repugnance to their union.

She read the earl's letter again, and this

painful idea grew into a conviction. That letter had been written some hours after his son's, and appeared to have been purposely worded so as to crush any hopes which the viscount's hurried note might induce her to cherish.

If the son was resolved to win his suit—the father was equally resolved not to grant it. The son said his father had too much affection to destroy his happiness by opposition;—the father said he had too much real regard for his son to yield to his imprudent wishes.

Cecil's fears grew stronger with thought; and she looked up into Mr. Ashton's face to gather hope and consolation; but there was no hope or consolation there—only pity and sorrow. Her fears were more than confirmed; and a deeper sadness fell upon her.

"I must know more of this before I can determine how to act," he remarked after a painful silence.

Cecil answered his questions frankly, though

not without embarrassment ; and his look grew more hopeful and cheering.

Fitz Elwyn's affection was not a new and sudden sentiment—it had been revealed and accepted in her prosperity, though Mr. Clare's pride had checked its growth. A sort of engagement might be said to have existed between them only broken off by misconception, and surely this might be pleaded without offence ; at any rate, she was not called on to give up the viscount till she had seen or heard from him again, nor did she know how to address him had she desired to write.

Mr. Ashton was slow in thought as in action ; he had vague ideas of affecting a change in her favour, but he required time to methodise his plans. That he felt for her and with her could not be doubted, for her sorrow reminded him of his early affection for her mother ; and that remembrance always moved him ; but still it was impossible for such a placid temper as his to enter fully into the feelings of such a being

as Cecil Clare, who, to the trusting affection of her mother, united the constancy and energy of her father. He could comprehend the nature of her suffering ; but not its extent.

She whom he had loved had married another, and he had soon after done the same, and passed through life with more than the average share of happiness ; but Cecil was not like him ;—she was one to set her fate upon a cast, and, should the die come up a blank, she could not throw again. She could give up Fitz Elwyn from generous motives or a sense of duty—she could pray for his happiness with another, one more worthy ;—she could even promote it, but a second attachment was not in her heart—was not in her nature.

She had sympathy and kindness for all around her ; but the unselfish affection that would deem nothing fitting a christian maiden too great a sacrifice to ensure the happiness of the one beloved, was given—and could not be transferred. Those who love lightly can

change lightly ;—those who love deeply, truly—cannot change.

Mr. Ashton though full of pity could not comprehend one half of this ; and his entreaties that she would keep herself calm and composed, as she quitted him to retire to her own room, if uttered with less real sympathy would have sounded like mockery. But her parting look so sad, and yet so patient dwelt on his mind, troubling his placid mood.

Mrs. Ashton having finished her breakfast, and given sundry orders touching the har-der, the dairy, and the laundry, would have harrassed her husband with questions respecting Lord Lindmoor's letter, had she not fortunately been occupied by a note from an elderly lady, who generally applied to her in all her difficulties, requesting her immediate presence at Eastbrook Cottage about eight miles off, and concluding with an earnest hope that she would remain some days ; a request which was readily complied with, Mrs. Blackwood being a

particular friend and favorite. Wonder at the cause of this sudden summons, and preparations for the visit, drove the earl's letter completely out of her head.

"I wish to speak with you, Robert," said Mr. Ashton, calling his son into his study, as soon as his lady had left the house.

"What do you want with me, sir?" enquired Robert coldly, after having so placed himself as to be screened from his father's observation.

"It is an awkward thing to do—but I want you to make a sacrifice," replied Mr. Ashton, who found considerable difficulty in opening the subject.

"An awkward thing to ask another to make a sacrifice for your own advantage? Oh! not at all, sir; it is a thing done every day in the great world, without any scruple; the sole difference being that the question is not put so plainly to the victim, but that comes of your

country simplicity ; the only really awkward thing is in making a sacrifice yourself."

" I request no sacrifice for my own advantage, Robert ; and would willingly make any in my power," replied Mr. Ashton reprovingly, hurt at his son's manner.

" Then such a course would be very ill-advised, and contrary to all established rules, sir ; it would sink you full five fathom in the opinion of all men likely to get on in the world. I hope you do not expect me to show as much country simplicity."

" I expect you to act generously, and thus make another happy," observed his father still more gravely.

" It is very unlucky, sir, but I am in a most ungenerous mood this morning, so must really decline becoming a martyr," said Robert rising to leave the room.

" At least listen to me—that I can claim as a mark of respect due to a parent."

Robert resumed his seat in silence ; there was that in his father's manner that touched and controlled him—a mournful earnestness which he had never seen before.

Mr. Ashton cleared his voice with a preliminary hem, and then dashed into his tale at once. He knew nothing of lengthening a story, but always made it as short as he could.

“ It seems Cecil and Lord Fitz Elwyn were friends, and more than friends in former days, when she was rich, and he poor ; but Mr. Clare, seeking a higher match for his child, broke off the engagement ; and as he believed the attachment, by intercepting the viscount's letters and returning a scornful refusal in his daughter's name. Each feeling wounded, met the other coldly, and misconception widened their estrangement ; but accident yesterday brought about an explanation, and Lord Fitz Elwyn left the house an accepted lover. The viscount was called away last night by the dangerous illness of his tutor ; and this morn-

ing came a letter from Lord Lindmoor declining the alliance on the plea of Cecil's want of fortune, and our opposition to his son during the election."

"And Lord Fitz Elwyn by his silence acquiesces in his father's decision," observed Robert with ill-suppressed triumph, after perusing the earl's letter.

"No; the viscount wrote before his departure, though, in consequence of some mistake, the letter did not reach Cecil till after breakfast."

"Where is the viscount's letter?" demanded Robert impatiently.

"In Cecil's care of course; that was not a letter to be shown to every one."

"I suppose not, sir," remarked his son with a sneer. "Did you see it?"

"Yes; she showed it to me as her friend and guardian, to clear her lover from the suspicion of neglect or coldness."

"And what might this lover's letter contain?"

asked Robert with an ironical emphasis on the word lover.

“Regrets at his forced absence—assurances that he should find little difficulty in overcoming his father’s opposition—entreaties that she would guard her health for his sake—and protestations of un—”

“Ay, unchanging affection—devotion—admiration—and other lover-like nonsense. I know what all that means,” observed Robert interrupting his father. “Such things are nothing ; of course men must put them in, or women are not satisfied ; a little *couleur de rose*—a delicate tint of flattery will not suffice ; you must use vermillion, and lay it on rich, that is with a trowel. Their cry is ever like the painter David’s ; ‘grind up more red.’ But I wonder that Lord Fitz Elwyn so high and lofty should have stooped to such folly ; or that Miss Clare, who shows more good sense than most of her sex in many things, should receive it graciously ; but reason and love are mutual

enemies I believe ; too decidedly opposed to each other to dwell in the same mind ; as easily might the Antipodes stand hand in hand, or wing to wing, like cherubs on a tomb stone. It is odd that women who must see change going on in every thing around them, ay, even in themselves, tacitly admitted by their anxiety to hide that change from others by glossy tresses and similar falsities, should make such a fuss about unchanging love. Pooh ! there is change in every thing, and every body ; and unchanging love in later years would be falsehood to the object of our youthful affection."

"You are in one of your singular humours this morning, Robert ; and there will be no use in attempting to put you right," remarked Mr. Ashton, who detested the trouble of an argument, particularly with his son, whose quickness and sarcasm never left him a chance of victory ; yet that son's manner was so irritating, that if any thing could have provoked him into a dispute he would have disputed on the present

occasion. "What do you think of Lord Lindmoor's letter?—that is more to the purpose."

"A very proper, prudent letter;—just such as a reasonable man should have written; and perfectly conclusive to all reasonable readers."

"Conclusive of what?"

"Conclusive, not only of the prudence, but of the strength of the Earl's resolution never to receive Miss Clare as his daughter-in-law."

"Yet Lord Fitz Elwyn thinks differently, as I told you before," observed Mr. Ashton, annoyed at his son's reckless manner.

"Pooh! pooh! my dear father; you must understand what that means. A man in the viscount's situation could not do otherwise than vow and protest; but Cecil with her good sense must comprehend the worth of these protestations, which are only employed to soften the blow to her, and lay the blame of breaking off the match on his father."

"But the earl's letter was written after his son's."

“ And therefore settles the point. Cecil is too high minded to enter any family unwilling to receive her; and must feel that she can never become Lady Fitz Elwyn. Of course she will regret this at first, for it would be pleasant to become a viscountess; and she will shed a few tears in secret, and look pale and interesting for a short time; then his lordship will marry Lady Barbara Hetherton—Cecil wed Mr. Somebody else; and the ex-lovers will dance together at the next county ball, and smile at their former extravagancies. A right merry termination of a sentimental affair.”

“ I wish you would talk a little more rationally, Robert. Neither Cecil nor Lord Fitz Elwyn will change lightly, as the viscount's letter would convince any unprejudiced reader. Surely something might be done to soften Lord Lindmoor's repugnance to the union.”

“ Done, my dear father! Surely Cecil would never sanction such an indelicate proceeding! The earl is peremptory; and she

must feel the propriety of submitting without a murmur," replied Robert hurriedly, flirting the leaves of a book that lay on the table as he spoke. "What could you possibly think of doing?"

"That is just what I wished to consult you about. To me the earl's decision does not appear irrevocable. One of his objections is our conduct at the election. Now he cannot blame me more than I blame myself, except that he considers that to have been wilful which was only the effect of indolence and bewilderment; and I will readily make an apology for my apparent want of delicacy and good feeling in turning the election against the viscount, after he had been acting such a generous and gallant part."

"Do sir, by all means; and you will be disbelieved by Lord Lindmoor, and despised by Fleetwood."

"You are ruled by passion and not reason

now, Robert. Truth will ever make itself believed; and as you well know I have ever regretted your hot interference which increased the difficulties of my position."

"That is just and right, sir; lay all the blame upon me. I ought to have allowed you to have been pulled to pieces by the blues—it was a most undutiful act preventing your becoming a political martyr *malgré vous*. But supposing your abject apologies accepted, there still remains the most serious objection—namely the money. How do you propose to get over that?"

"There is no chance of getting over it in your present temper, Robert; my hopes of your generosity it seems are vain. The earl may suppose as others have done, that Cecil is utterly destitute; and five thousand pounds might make some difference in his decision."

"Scarcely so paltry a sum I should think, sir. But where is the five thousand pounds to come

from ? I understood by the last accounts that she has little hope of receiving more than three."

"Such Robert are the last accounts ; and to you only can I look to make up the deficiency. That is the portion of my younger children, secured by their mother's settlement. In former days I loved Cecil's mother, though we were parted by the interested views of her relations. I promised Mrs. Clare on her death bed to regard Cecil as a daughter ; and I would now, with your consent, secure her a daughter's portion."

"Do not count on my consent, sir ; I will do nothing to promote her union with Lord Fitz Elwyn, whom I detest," exclaimed Robert with passion, dashing down the book with the leaves of which he had been playing, with a violence that surprised his father.

"I am sorry to hear you say so, having deemed you above selfish motives ; you might be repaid however, for the surplus from her father's property may be more."

"I do not see a chance of its exceeding three thousand pounds; and she has no right to expect an addition from me," replied Robert sullenly.

"No right I admit; I appeal to your generosity—not to your justice; and she neither has, nor must have the slightest idea of this application."

"I am not in a generous mood, sir. I told you so before."

"You have disappointed me, Robert," said his father gravely. "I never before believed you mercenary."

"I am not mercenary, sir; I do not care a pin's point for money;—give ten thousand pounds to the county hospital if you will—it is not that; but I have a particular enmity to Lord Fitz Elwyn; and will cross him in his love—if I can," exclaimed Robert vehemently.

"Then I can only pray that my son may be vouchsafed a more christian spirit. And Cecil, poor Cecil, must bear her sorrow as

she best can. I shall not soon forget her parting look—so very, very sad—yet so resigned.”

“Never fear, sir; she will soon get over the disappointment; all girls do; besides, she has wonderful firmness, and will think it a duty to struggle against despondency,” observed Robert pettishly.

“She is a person of strong feelings and should not be spoken of with levity,” replied his father reprovingly.

“Dear me, sir, you are making as much fuss with Miss Clare as my mother did, which set me against her.”

“I feel a deep interest in her happiness for her poor mother’s sake,” said Mr. Ashton more warmly, a little irritated by his son’s remarks.

“A deep interest indeed, sir; you care more for the happiness of a stranger, than the happiness of your own son,” exclaimed Robert almost fiercely.

"What do you mean?" enquired Mr. Ashton with unusual energy, startled by his vehemence.

"That as you loved the mother, so do I love the daughter," replied his son with a hollow voice, starting up and pacing the room.

"Poor Robert! I never thought of that," said Mr. Ashton after recovering from the shock caused by this painful confession.

Mrs. Ashton's favorite expression—"that is just like you—you never think of anything," rose to Robert's lips; but a glance at his father checked its utterance; tears were rolling down his cheeks, and there was no mistaking the fulness of his sympathy; he was thinking of the crossing of his own early love, and suffering again the pangs of his youth in the person of his son. Even Robert's haughty spirit, chafed as it was, did not disdain such tender and delicate pity. He wrung his hand in silence; for he dared not trust himself to speak; and then turning abruptly to a window looked out on

nothing. There was a long and painful pause, which was at length broken by Mr. Ashton.

"Forgive me, Robert, if I blamed you for your petulance. I never guessed what pain I was inflicting. We will not touch on the subject again. I can do nothing now; and Cecil must learn to bear her fate."

"Yes, sir, you can do a great deal," replied Robert quickly, moved to more generous thoughts by his father's gentle sympathy, "you can do every thing," he repeated standing proudly before his parent. "Go as you proposed to Lord Lindmoor, make every fitting apology for yourself—and me; I leave my honor in your hands. Say that if five thousand pounds (and if that should not be enough add another five) will win him to consent to his son's union with Miss Clare, it shall be paid down on her wedding day. Think not of me—argue not with me,"—he continued vehemently, stamping with impatience as Mr. Ashton seemed inclined to interrupt him. "I promised Cecil to be to her

as a kind brother; and I will keep my word—if I can. Away on the instant—take me whilst the better mood is on me;—even now pride, passion and revenge are raging for the mastery. Do not hesitate—do not delay. I owe her some reparation for the pangs I have cost her.”

Before Mr. Ashton could reply Robert had rushed from the room, leaving his father to wonder and moralise on his sudden transitions—his whirlwind passion, and chivalric generosity.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD Lindmoor's feeling was the opposite of pleasure on hearing that Mr. Ashton wished to speak with him ; and his demeanour as he entered the library, where his guest awaited him, was not calculated to raise his visitor's hopes.

" Your lordship has doubtless guessed the purpose of my visit," began poor Mr. Ashton with some hesitation, being embarrassed by his host's magnificent manner.

"If you mean, Mr. Ashton, that your present visit has reference to the letter transmitted through you this morning, you must excuse me if I decline any conversation on the subject; my resolution is not to be changed," replied Lord Lindmoor haughtily.

"I trust you will show me the courtesy of listening before you decide irrevocably; I will not detain you long," observed Mr. Ashton, hurt at his lordship's impatience.

The earl's cheek flushed with vexation; but he bowed a cold assent, and Mr. Ashton proceeded.

"You mention two causes of objection, my lord; and I am ready to meet you on both; and being deeply interested in Miss Clare's happiness, which I fear depends on a union with your son, I hope what I have to say may effect some change in your views on this point. I come to make the most ample apology for any apparent enmity towards Lord Fitz Elwyn during the election."

“ I require no apology ;” replied Lord Lindmoor, as proudly as before.

“ Possibly not, my lord ; but I am anxious to offer the explanation, which I feel to be due to your noble son. Party zeal has made the reservation of my vote, which was only the effect of constitutional indolence, appear a studied insult to Lord Fitz Elwyn ; but a knowledge of my general character should convince your lordship that such could not have been my intention. There are few people whom I esteem more highly than the viscount ; and though my former friendship for his father and connection with his party, induced me to promise my vote to Mr. Fleetwood, my reluctance to give it against Lord Fitz Elwyn was proved by the very tardiness which is brought as a charge against me. Having promised my vote when once in the booth I could not refuse to give it ; but I would rather have been maltreated by the crowd, from whom the viscount rescued me, than have been compelled to such

seeming ingratitude for his manly protection. Bewildered by the bustle, I understood not the value of my vote, till too late even for explanation. When I looked for your son to express my regret and gratitude he was gone; and your lordship turned away in anger. I ought to have written; but I put off every thing to the future that should be done immediately; and then waste my time in idle murmurs at neglected opportunities. Nor is it only for myself I would apologise; I have *carte blanche* from my eldest son to say all that can be said in extenuation of any party heat; and beg you to pardon what cannot be excused."

"My letter sought no apology, Mr. Ashton; and I entertain no enmity towards you or your son," replied his lordship coldly, but less proudly than before, for his visitor's simple frankness moved him in spite of himself.

"I am glad to hear you say so, my lord; and as you have ceased to count us as enemies, I hope you will shortly learn to regard us as friends."

"The difference in our political views will naturally forbid any great intimacy, which was all that I meant to express in my letter," said his lordship.

"I am grieved to hear you say so, my lord, and always regret these party divisions that tear asunder the dearest ties; and check the soothing charities of life; but Cecil Clare is little of a politician, and all her sympathies are for the whigs."

"I have no wish to interfere with Miss Clare's political principles, Mr. Ashton; they are—they can be nothing to me, or mine. I hoped that my resolution on this point would have been understood and respected; situated as she is, a silent acquiescence in my decision would have been more generous and delicate."

"Blame me, my lord, for this visit if you will, but not Cecil Clare, to whom I dared not give a hint of my purpose, lest it should have been forbidden. I merely came to explain the situation in which she really stands; and if

tempted to plead for her, as I would not plead for a daughter of my own, it is because her dying mother consigned her to my care, believing that she had not another friend on earth. She is not as poor as is generally reported; and if a fortune of five thousand pounds can change—”

“It can—not,” interrupted his lordship abruptly.

“Would ten suffice?” asked Mr. Ashton after a minute’s pause, during which his thoughts were with Robert.

“Mr. Ashton, my son is not to be purchased,” replied the earl with a lofty air. “My objections to his union with Miss Clare are insurmountable; and you must pardon me if I decline all further conversation on so painful a subject; Lord Fitz Elwyn’s wife should be his equal in birth and station. Will you allow me to offer you some refreshment.”

“Nothing I thank you, Lord Lindmoor,” replied Mr. Ashton with a sigh. “I have

failed in my purpose, and will not detain you longer than to express a hope that if there has been anything displeasing to you in the matter or manner of my communication, you will lay all the blame on me to whom of right it belongs, and not allow my faults to prejudice her for whom I came to plead."

"Oh! certainly not, Mr. Ashton; and I hope you will not consider me uncourteous in closing a conference that can bring pleasure to neither," replied the earl with stately politeness, but not dissembling his wish to put an end to this painful interview.

Mr. Ashton's heart was heavy as he paced up the Lindmoor avenue. He dreaded to see Cecil pine away, for her health was too delicate to stand so severe a shock. And Robert—how would he receive the intelligence?—in joy—or sorrow?—with a generous, or a jealous feeling? Who could ever guess what would be Robert's mood for five minutes forward.

"Does the earl relent?" demanded Robert

abruptly, appearing from a thicket near the road as his father approached Ashton Grove.

“No ; his resolution is unalterable,” replied Mr. Ashton without raising his eyes to his son’s face.

“Thank Heaven !” burst from the agitated young man. “But no, no ; selfish wretch that I am to rejoice in her misery !” he exclaimed with a wildness bordering on delirium, darting back into the depths of the wood ere his father could detain him.

Timid, indolent, and ever averse to inflicting pain Mr. Ashton would have concealed his visit to Lindmoor ; but Helen Wilder having accidentally met him on his road, and mentioned the circumstance, Cecil, guessing the purpose of his visit, insisted on hearing its result ; so without entering into particulars he was compelled to admit that the earl was not to be moved.

Cecil heard him in silence ; she did not murmur—she did not weep ; but after the lapse of

a few minutes rose to leave the room. The effort was too great a trial of strength—her head grew dizzy—she tottered and would have fallen to the ground had not the anxious and affectionate Emma rushed forward in time to catch her.

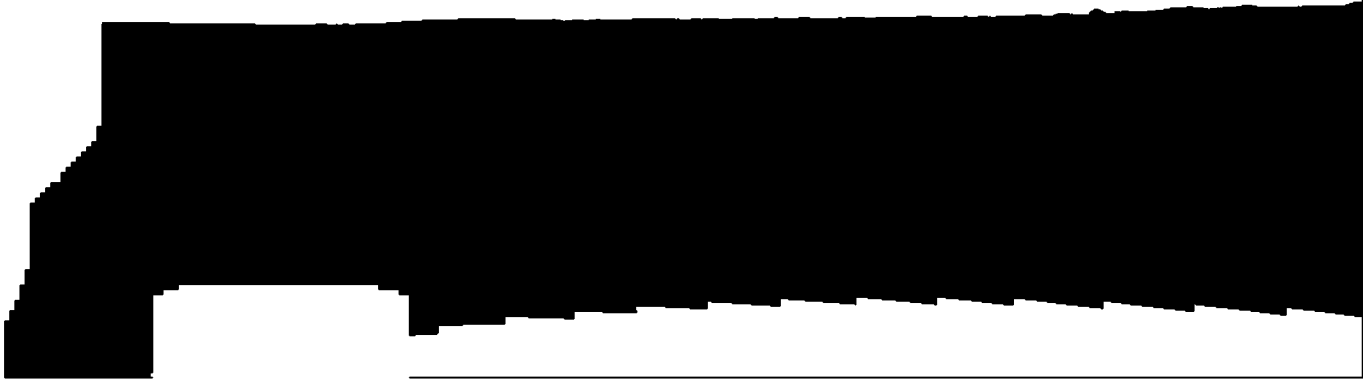
What a contrast to her feelings were those of Emma Ashton and Helen Wilder, who bent over her, tending her so kindly! They were all hope and happiness, and she all doubt and sorrow. Their affection was sanctioned by parents and friends, for Captain Wilder had that day given his consent to his daughter's union with Edward, whilst hers was blighted in the bud—herself despised—rejected.

“I wish I could see tears, Cecil; I am sure they would bring you relief. Weep, weep! do any thing but look so sad,” exclaimed the affectionate Emma, tears streaming plentifully from her own eyes the while. “Do not despair, dear Cecil; Sir Thomas Willerton has great influence with Lord Lindmoor, and his

persuasions cannot fail," she added with perfect confidence in the effect of her warm-hearted lover's eloquence.

"And my father and Edward have been of no little service during the election ; and both will gladly draw sword in your cause," said Helen Wilder with as proud a confidence in those she loved.

"I thank you both—I thank you all," replied poor Cecil in a hollow voice, that shocked her hearers ; "but there must be no persuasion—no more pleading. Lord Lindmoor is right ; his son should wed a lady of equal birth and fortune ; and should we ever meet again such should—such shall be my advice. Bear with me a little while, dear friends," she added affectionately passing an arm round each. "I am not as weak as you think—it is the body that has given way, and not the mind. Never recur to the past—I must strive to forget that ; let me come and go as I will without question, or comment, and do not fear that my sadness



shall cloud your joy. Above all, dear Emma, beg your mother not to speak to me ; her kindness would distress me more," she added, shuddering at the thought of Mrs. Ashton's torturing consolations.

"It shall be all as you wish," replied the weeping Emma, respecting her friend's desire to avoid all conversation on the painful subject.

"I have seen a great deal of Lord Fitz Elwyn lately ; and will wager the ring received as a pledge of faith this morning, and which I do not value lightly, that the viscount will bear down all opposition and win you yet," cried the frank, high spirited Helen. "So keep up your spirits, dear Cecil, for we cannot feel happy whilst you are so sad."

A sudden light lit up Cecil's haggard features at these words ; but it passed away on the instant, leaving those features more haggard than before.

"No, no ; that cannot—must not be," she murmured with a look so mournful, and so deso-

late that Emma unable to bear it quitted the room.

"Poor Cecil!" said Mr. Ashton with a faltering voice as his daughter told him of that heart rending look, which showed how earthly hope had all departed. "There is one chance yet; I never thought of this before," he exclaimed, as Emma closed the door, drawing an inkstand towards him with a promptness rarely shown in his more active days.

The pen passed rapidly over the paper with that nervous dash at the end of the words which shows excitement; but none in the house knew to whom that letter was addressed.

Cecil neither made a parade of sorrow, nor affected gaiety; the first was beneath her—the last beyond her; but she did all in her power to avoid throwing a damp over the happiness of those around her. None saw her weep—none heard her complain; she tried to appear interested in the concerns and occupations of others—she even strove to smile; but those

sickly smiles wrung the hearts of all who saw them. It was evident that life and its daily pursuits had lost all present interest in her eyes ; she thought of events now only as they would affect her friends—to her they could bring no joy ; and but little increase of sorrow. She had no kindred—no loving mother or sister to whom she could turn for consolation—she was alone in the world. And what a world to her ! one stroke had laid its beauties waste, and made it desolate.

Ashton Grove was full of painful recollections. The friends whom she had loved, the bowers where she had sat—the woods where she had wandered—the verdant lawn—the fragrant flowers—all—all reminded her of her brief dream of bliss—of him of whom she must not think. To regain real tranquility, whilst surrounded by objects reminding her of her suffering was impossible—her strength would fail beneath the effort—she must leave Ashton Grove, and its kind inmates—she must go to a

strange place—among strange faces—no matter where—no matter with whom, only not to Milford and the Fords. But she could not go yet—she must wait a few days till Lord Fitz Elwyn's return;—she had no right to refuse him an interview should he desire it;—but would he desire it? Would he yield an instant and silent consent to his father's wishes, or would he still seek to win her, as Helen Wilder had asserted? It was this doubt that kept her in a constant state of anxiety, which all her efforts could neither control nor hide. The slightest bustle—a sudden noise—the loud closing of a door, even the rushing flight of a bird startled and flurried her. No wonder therefore that with all her prayers for fortitude—all her struggles for composure—she grew more thin and ghastly every day.

Robert could not endure the sight of her silent, patient suffering. It was partly his doing. His violence before and during the election had influenced Lord Lindmoor's

decision. When they met, which was as rarely as possible, he gazed upon her with a mingling of pity, anger, and remorse, most painful to the sensitive Cecil. He seldom addressed her, but she could read his feelings in his looks, his hurried manner, and the abruptness with which he would start from his seat, and quit the room. He fled her presence, for her sunken cheeks and hollow eyes were a bitter reproach. Day after day he might be seen galloping across the country, outstripping the wild huntsman in his speed, or buried in some hidden covert, or flirting with Miss Power, jesting and laughing with a frensied gaiety, which had something alarming in its recklessness. Even Charles's boyish, boisterous mirth was softened and subdued when he looked on Cecil. From the rest of the family, and Helen Wilder she was certain of that quiet, gentle sympathy which soothes without enervating.

Fortunately Mrs. Ashton was still detained at Eastbrook Cottage by the indisposition and

household troubles of her friend, so Cecil was spared her drops, and what she feared far more, her fretting and tormenting kindness.

Flinter lost his triumphant look, and skulked about, doubting whether he had not done more harm than good by the stratagem on which he had before so piqued himself.

Nothing was seen of the Lindmoors, but it was rumoured among the servants that they were to take their departure in a few days for Brighton, or Hastings, or Leamington, or some other fashionable watering place.

CHAPTER IX.

RATHER more than a week had passed since Lord Fitz Elwyn's sudden journey, when one bright sunny morning he unexpectedly made his appearance at Lindmoor.

"Frederick ! my dear Frederick !" exclaimed his mother receiving his embrace with a mother's joy.

"How comes this ? Have you not received my letter, saying that we should set off for Hastings immediately ?" enquired the earl, with a cloud on his brow.

"Yes, my dear father; and it is that letter which has brought me hither with such speed. Mr. Tennant, I am happy to say, having been pronounced out of danger yesterday."

"I hope you have not thus returned in defiance of my wishes from any vague idea that I am to be moved from my purpose by your persuasions; if so I tell you plainly that I will not—"

"Refuse to listen to me before you condemn me to misery," said his son, closing the sentence. "My happiness is in your hands," he continued rapidly, leaving the earl no time for reply. "Will you blight the happiness of your only son, and condemn him to a life of gloom, when but one word from you would shed a flood of joy around his path? My love for Cecil Clare is not the fancy of an instant—the evanescent passion of an unstable mind;

"But the high feeling, which the stately soul
Feels slow engross it, but engross it whole."

It has withstood time—her fancied incon-

stancy, and scornful rejection; struggled against, combatted with, it has only acquired strength from opposition. Events that would have torn up a lighter feeling, have only rooted this the firmer. The search after faults that would the more easily enable me to conquer my then hopeless passion, only made me more than ever its slave, by showing me fresh virtues;—that love has now become a portion of my being, and can only depart with life itself. I dare not ask her whom I love to give me her hand unknown to you—she would spurn the thought; I will never marry without your full consent; but if I wed not Cecil Clare, I will wed no other. I have already pledged myself to that—and I will keep my pledge. I owe you and my mother not only the duty, but the affection of a child. Your love brought safety to my infancy, and joy to my youth—shall it not also gild and bless my manhood? What is rank? what is wealth? that the peace of our home should be sacrificed for their idle glitter?

Cecil's wishes are moderate as my own. We will not deprive you or my mother of one single comfort or luxury ; my present income shall supply all our wants. I have never embarrassed you by my extravagance—I will not do so now. Do not pay your son so bad a compliment as to suppose that he cannot prove himself worthy of his rank without a splendid equipage, and a long train of servants. Mr. Tennant's hasty summons left me no time to plead my hopes ; but I had no idea till the arrival of your letter that you would so promptly convey your decision to Miss Clare. What must she not have endured, for the last few days ? What has she not thought of my silence ? It is to save her and myself from further suffering, that I have hurried to plead as a child to my parents for their consent to a union, which can alone secure my happiness. If you could bring aught against Cecil Clare herself I would be dumb ; but do not sell my peace for the sake of gold ; wealth cannot satisfy the craving heart. I cannot

boast of Cecil's riches, nor her rank ; but she has intrinsic worth above both these. If you doubt that worth, though I think you do not, seek her acquaintance—put her to any test ; and I will abide by your decision ; but again I entreat you not to make your son, your only son the victim of ambition. There are tears in your eyes, my dear mother ; plead for me with my father," he continued taking her hand, and placing it within the earl's. " I have seen your mutual affection—I have learnt from you how united hearts may be ;—do not forbid me the practice of this teaching."

" We were very happy, yet we were not rich ;" said Lady Lindmoor, looking up with affectionate pleading into her husband's face, who half shunned, half met her gaze.

" And Cecil Clare and your son will be as happy, if you but bless their union," added Fitz Elwyn, taking the earl's other hand. " You will not deny me that happiness, my father?"

" No, no ; I cannot withstand you both ; so

bless you my boy ! and may Cecil Clare prove as good a wife to you, as your mother has proved to me !” replied the earl with glistening eyes, passing one arm round his weeping, smiling countess ; and laying the other hand solemnly on his son’s shoulder. “ You have been a blessing to us from your birth ; and my first care in life is your happiness. I thought to promote it though at the cost of present pain, by refusing my consent to your wishes ; perhaps I judged unwisely.”

“ Indeed you did ; but I never doubted your affection, my dear father ; and you will now have two children to bless and love instead of only one, bound to you by the tenderest ties of gratitude,” exclaimed the viscount, raising his hand to his lips with respectful emotion. .

“ I will not doubt it,” said the earl with feeling.

“ Thank you, sir ; this confidence in my gratitude and affection shall not be misplaced. But Cecil must be suffering great anxiety.

Now that you have consented to make me happy, perhaps you would send—or—”

“See her, and report your wondrous eloquence,” said the earl with a smile, observing that his son hesitated.

“Exactly, sir; your kindness has anticipated my wishes.”

“What say you to calling at Ashton Grove this morning?” said the earl to his lady. “My note was rather cavalier, for I was vexed at Fitz Elwyn’s avowal, and we owe Miss Clare some extra courtesy to overbalance it. I am not one to do things by halves; and from this moment regard her as a daughter. Besides, I have to make amends to Mr. Ashton, who met a colder reception than he deserved. But his fidgety, fussy wife, setting every one wrong, and making every one uncomfortable by her over zeal to set them right, and at their ease—I shall never stand her, Fitz Elwyn,” added the earl with a ludicrous expression of horror.

“Oh, yea you will, sir. Listen to Cecil’s

account of her kindness; and you will not only learn to endure, but absolutely to love her. I should not wonder if within the week you consented to try her favorite drops."

"I should wonder very much," replied the earl, shrugging his shoulders; but unwilling to damp by stronger comment the spirits of his happy son, who looked a different person from the cold, and listless Fitz Elwyn of some few months past.

Never was such a beautifier, and health restorer as happiness; and the eyes of the earl and countess sparkled with pride and affection as they gazed on his glowing, animated countenance.

"I will go and prepare Cecil for your visit," he said after relating some particulars, concerning Mr. Tennant's illness.

"Do; but be moderate in your transports, or Miss Clare will decline an alliance with a mad man," observed his father with a smile.

"Take care, sir, lest I ask my mother

whether I inherit such madness from my father," replied the viscount, glancing back as he was leaving the room.

The next minute he was bounding across the park in the direction of Ashton Grove.

"How is Miss Clare? Where is Miss Clare?" demanded Fitz Elwyn of Edward Ashton, whom he met on the lawn, never heeding questions or answers concerning health, unconscious even of the presence of Helen Wilder, who was leaning on her lover's arm.

"She is in her own pet den, as she calls it; follow me, and I will show you the way. I guess I may offer my congratulations, without troubling you with queries," replied the delighted Edward; [reading the happiness of his favorites in the viscount's glancing eye.

"Yes, I am the happiest man alive; but have no time for explanation now. Let us hasten to Miss Clare."

"Very well, my lord; we are progressing at the rate of thirty miles an hour as it is; you

would not go breathless into your lady's presence. And as for your being the happiest man alive, methinks I can match you."

"Then accept my sincere congratulations; and convey the same to the fair Helen, whom I guess to be the cause of your felicity."

"Rightly guessed, my lord; but you shall convey your congratulations yourself, and win her forgiveness, if you can, for not seeing her just now though within a foot of your elbow."

"I beg her ten thousand pardons; but she will be merciful I know, and make allowances," replied Fitz Elwyn colouring at the accusation.

"I come the *avant courier* of good tidings, and the announcer of a pleasant visitor," said Edward approaching Cecil, who was seated with her back to the door. "Are you sufficiently composed to receive him?"

"Him! What visitor?" questioned the startled Cecil, trembling in every limb, and gazing wildly into Edward's face.

"Not an unwelcome visitor I trust, my own,

my beloved," exclaimed the impatient Fitz Elwyn springing forward.

Edward lingered an instant to see that there was no need of female attendance, salts or sal-volatile; and then rejoined Helen and Emma on the lawn with the assurance that the vis-count had proved a far more efficacious bloom restorer, than all his mother's drops, or their tender nursing.

"Lord and Lady Lindmoor are in the drawing room," said Emma, entering Cecil's pet den about an hour after.

It was with faltering steps and downcast eyes that Cecil entered the drawing room, timidly leaning on Fitz Elwyn's arm; but the affectionate embrace of the Countess, and the kind parental greeting of the Earl allayed her agitation, and restored her to tolerable composure.

Notwithstanding all Fitz Elwyn's assurances she fancied his parents had only yielded a reluctant consent, and feared to meet their

eyes, lest she should read in them coldness or dislike, but these fears were groundless. The earl, as he had said, did not do things by halves ; and his consent once given, his natural kindness was allowed full play. He had a feeling, generous heart, though his nobler qualities had of late been a little dimmed by pride ; and having now relinquished all hope of securing Lady Barbara Hetherton's sixty thousand pounds to keep up the title, he was ready to admit that Cecil's conduct on every occasion where it had come beneath his notice had been that of a delicate, and high minded woman ; and the timid grace, the heartfelt gratitude with which she received his blessing on her union with his son, completed her conquest over all his remaining prejudices.

As for the countess, it was enough that Cecil was beloved by Fitz Elwyn, to ensure her a place in his mother's heart.

To spare Cecil, whose whole appearance, notwithstanding the feverish flush on her cheek,

showed the ravages caused by her late anxiety, from further agitation, or the embarrassment of a *tête-à-tête* with the earl and countess, it had been agreed before her entrance that Mr. Ashton and Emma should remain in the room ; and Edward and Helen entering soon after a lively conversation ensued, which served to banish Cecil's tremors, though she said but little, in the midst of which Mr. Ashton was summoned to his study by the announcement that a gentleman wished to speak with him on particular business.

Mr. Ashton's embarrassment as he followed the servant out of the room, after apologising to his guests, filled Edward with some surprise and curiosity, his father being so rarely moved by any intelligence ; but he was not doomed to be kept long in suspense, for ere little more than five minutes the study door re-opened, and steps were heard approaching the drawing-room, mingled with the murmur of voices.

“ I do not care how far it has proceeded, she shall enter no family not perfectly willing to receive her,” were the words that fell distinctly on every ear, as Mr. Ashton re-entered the apartment followed by Mr. Lake.

“ Mr. Lake ! I am delighted to see you,” exclaimed Fitz Elwyn, shaking him warmly by the hand. “ I have been wishing to thank you for your exertions on my behalf, but you ran away so immediately after the election that I have not seen you since.”

“ And I too have my best thanks to offer,” said the earl, advancing to meet this unexpected visitor with equal cordiality.

“ Stop there, my lord ; I have shaken hands with your son, for he is a fine, noble young man ; but I will not answer for it that I shall shake hands with you,” replied Mr. Lake, keeping his arm pressed close to his side.

“ Refuse to shake hands with me, why what have I done to offend you ?” enquired the earl

with a wondering, but good humoured smile, having become reconciled by use to the South American's bluntness.

"I will tell you what you have done to offend me, my lord; you have refused to receive my niece as your daughter."

"Your niece!" exclaimed all present in amazement.

"Yes, my niece! Cecil Clare is my niece, as Mr. Ashton can tell you. Do not deny the relationship, Cecil, for I count on your affection to soothe my declining years," he continued turning towards the bewildered girl. "I am your mother's only brother, and your nearest relative. Having squandered my paternal property, I was driven abroad by the hope of repairing its loss; and, with God's blessing on my unwearied industry, have redeemed my fallen fortunes. None cared for the poor spendthrift, and none asked of his welfare; and the story spread that he was no more. Years passed, and with those years came a yearning

to look upon upon my home and kindred. I returned to my native land; but there were none to welcome me. My sister slept in the silent grave, beside her husband, with whom I had quarrelled before my departure; the friends of my childhood knew me not, for the small pox had completely changed my appearance, and rendered cold by time and the world's hardships had long ceased to care for the companion of their youth. I learnt that my sister had left a child, an only daughter, who would have been homeless, friendless, penniless, but for the generous care of one, whom I had as my father's ward, wronged, crossed and insulted in by-gone years. I had wronged my gentle sister too, forcing her to wed with one whom she did not love; and it had been the hope of my later years to receive her forgiveness before I died—to make her all the reparation in my power; but this was denied me, and all that was left was to transfer to her daughter the affection, which I had intended, deeply

repenting my former harshness, to lavish upon her. But the fancy struck me to conceal my name for a time, that I might better study the disposition of my niece, and thus more surely learn how to insure her future happiness. From the change in my appearance I had remained unknown to former intimates, and hoped to do the same with Mr. Ashton; but I was mistaken and compelled to make him the confidant of my plans, and persuade him to assist me in winning myself an interest in the heart of my sister's child. And now, Cecil, that you have heard my tale, will you not grant me the love of a niece? Will you not receive me as your mother's brother?"

"Do not doubt it. You have already won my regard as a stranger, and shall be warmly welcomed as an uncle," answered Cecil touched by his earnest appeal.

"Heaven bless you, Cecil! Then I am not a solitary old man with no one to care for me, as I had feared," said Mr. Lake with much

feeling, kissing his niece's cheek. "But this was not all my business here," he added in a sterner voice, but still retaining her hand. "As your uncle, I cannot permit your entrance into any family the heads of which are unwilling to receive you."

"No unwillingness exists; your niece will be welcomed as a beloved daughter," observed Lord Lindmoor anxious to spare Cecil pain and embarrassment.

"Frankly and kindly said, my lord; but I know that there has been unwillingness; and I also know that you desired wealth for your son."

"That son never desired it for himself," observed Fitz Elwyn quickly.

"Perhaps not, my lord; but both father and son may hereafter despise my niece on account of her poverty; she shall therefore have a choice, which was not alas! allowed to her poor mother; a sense of poverty shall not tempt her

to a union which she might hereafter repent. I will not so far exert an uncle's authority as to decline this union without your consent, Cecil; but I will furnish you with a sufficient excuse for doing so if you desire it. Here is a deed of gift of ten thousand pounds; break off this engagement, and it shall be yours; fulfil it and I bestow my gains on another."

Cecil did not speak; but she let fall her uncle's hand, and after one reproachful glance looked on the ground, her colour varying every instant.

"Is this your kindness? this your professed friendship, Mr. Lake? I would that you had been less zealous for my election, that I might speak more strongly. But Cecil, dear Cecil! You will not heed him? You will prize my love above his gold!" exclaimed Fitz Elwyn passionately, approaching to take her hand.

"Stand back, my lord; it is not for you to interfere with my niece's choice."

"Your pardon, Mr. Lake; it is for me to offer Cecil the devotion of a life in lieu of your promised wealth."

"She has learnt from your father, Lord Fitz Elwyn, the value of the latter; and so tutored will I doubt not make a wise decision. Come, Cecil, I await your choice. Independence with your uncle's affection; or dependence on the humours of a family reluctant to receive you. If you decide on the last, I fill up this paper with another name."

"State the matter more fairly," exclaimed the indignant lover. "My parents will receive her as a beloved daughter; and for myself, I wed Cecil Clare, or I wed none. Let him give his wealth to another, dear Cecil; and trust me you shall never have cause to repent it. The most devoted affection—the deepest gratitude shall be yours through life. Do not cloud the hopes that have just dawned so brightly," he continued with passionate earnestness.

"It is not for you;—it is not for me to

decide," replied Cecil with a changing cheek, gently withdrawing her hand from his, and glancing towards the earl and countess.

There was no mistaking that appealing look, so swift withdrawn—that timid, faltering voice which she had vainly striven to make steady.

"Will you leave the decision to me?" asked the earl advancing promptly.

"Yes;" answered Cecil in a tone scarcely above a whisper, whilst her hand trembled in his.

"Then thus I decide," said Lord Lindmoor, giving that cold and trembling hand to the enraptured viscount, who received it as the greatest boon earth had to give. "You shall ever find in me an affectionate father."

"And in me the fondness of a mother," added the countess with glistening eyes, whilst Fitz Elwyn whispered his raptures without heeding Cecil's blushes.

"Then, Cecil, you give up your uncle's gold, and your uncle's love."

"No, not his love ; he must still grant me that," replied Cecil pleadingly.

"We will think of that ; but the money, as I told you, goes to another," answered her uncle firmly, but not unkindly, turning towards a table from which he took a pen and inserted a name in the deed of gift ;—it was the name of Lord Fitz Elwyn.

"There, my lord," he said presenting the paper to the viscount ; "take this, and with it my best wishes for your future happiness. You have wooed nobly, and have not won as you supposed a portionless bride."

"This is too much, Mr. Lake," exclaimed Fitz Elwyn with a quivering lip, for he was deeply touched by the generous act. "But it belongs not to me—it belongs to your niece."

"No such thing, my lord ; it belongs solely to you, to do with as you will ; and my niece knows so little of the value of money, as she has just proved, that if wise you will give her

none of it. I said it should be bestowed on another ; and I am a man of my word."

"I am overpowered, Mr. Lake ; and know not how to express my thanks, can you forgive my hasty words just now ? I feared you wished to part me from your niece ; and she is in my estimation more precious than all your gold ; but with that gold I hope you will give me your regard."

"That you have already, my lord ; or you should not have had the gold."

"And you will give me your love," said Cecil coaxingly.

"I cannot refuse you, if I would," replied Mr. Lake, kissing her affectionately, tears starting into his eyes as he looked upon her, for she brought to his mind the sister whom he had wronged. "And now, my lord, can you pardon me for putting your regard for my niece to the test ; and will you give me the hand I declined before ?"

"Willingly," replied Lord Lindmoor, with

feeling. "I was to blame in withholding my consent at first ; but I was prejudiced."

"You did nobly, my lord, in rescinding that refusal so handsomely ; few would have so acted, and I hope to make my niece a fitting bride for your son in point of fortune."

"It is very improbable that I shall ever marry, unless indeed Miss Wilder should fall desperately in love with me, and ask me to have her, and then I could not in gallantry say—no," he added looking mischievously at that young lady, to whom Edward was whispering some lover's eloquence.

"Miss Wilder has a sort of a kind of an affection for Mr. Lake, on account of his conduct this morning, but she will never interfere with her friend's interest," replied the blushing Helen.

"Well then I suppose I must remain an old bachelor, and leave all I have to my niece. So, my lord, Cecil shall have five thousand pounds from me on her wedding day, besides

what her own fortune may turn out, which owing to some arrangements in my power to make, may more than equal that amount; and at my death she will inherit all I have."

"I trust it will be many, many years ere she receive that last; you shame, yet attach me by your generosity," replied Lord Lindmoor warmly.

We will not detail all the pretty things that were said, which perhaps pleased the more from Mrs. Ashton's not being there to worry every one with her great friendship, for the earl and countess took their leave before her return, engaging to dine at Ashton Grove on the morrow. The Viscount and Mr. Lake lingered behind.

"I wish you joy, my lord. I wish you joy, Miss Cecil. God bless you both, and make you happy," said honest Flinter, joining the viscount and his lady-love on the lawn, where they were sauntering with the rest of the party,

only a little aside, towards the close of the same day.

“Thank you, Flinter,” replied Fitz Elwyn graciously. “I am not sure whether I do not owe my happiness to you ; at least you had some hand in it, for if you had not sent me on with the parcel, I might never have come to an explanation with Miss Clare.”

“Thank you kindly, my lord, for saying so. Yes, yes ; I did not send you on for nothing. I knew Miss Cecil was alone, though I did not tell you, or you would have gone the other way, as you did afore ; but I saw there was some’at betwixt you, and thought if I could get you together it would all come out ; and so it has you see, my lord,” cried Flinter with a triumphant chuckle.

“But how could you tell that there was any thing betwixt us, as you call it, when no one else suspected it, Flinter ?”

“Because I see’d your look, my lord, one



day, when I chanced to say some'at of Miss Cecil; and I knew that people did not look in that way for nothing. I tell you what, my lord, Thomas Flinter knows a great deal more than some folks thinks for," replied the honest bailiff with a knowing nod.

"Indeed; then we must take care, Cecil," said the viscount laughing.

"No fear of me, my lord; I was in love myself once, and thoff' poor Bessy died, yet for her sake I helps on all true love matters. Besides, Miss Cecil spoke and looked so kind from the first moment she came into the house, that I loves her a'most as well as one of master's children; and I looks upon them as my own."

"I am much obliged for your good opinion, and good wishes," said the blushing Cecil; and she spoke so sweetly that the old man loved her better than before.

"Hey day! I shall be jealous," remarked Fitz Elwyn gaily.

Flinter laughed heartily at the viscount's observation; and then with reiterated good wishes left them, passing a merry jest with Edward and Miss Wilder, who were also great favorites, as he took his way to the stables.

Shortly after he was seen on his sturdy pony, the counterpart of himself some people asserted, trotting towards the lodge. The truth was that the now triumphant Flinter, as some compensation for his late disappointment, had set his heart on being the first to tell the news to Mrs. Ashton, who was momentarily expected; which he knew he could effect by waylaying the britscha between the house and the outer gate, as his mistress, who could not abide sitting still for long together even in a carriage, would be sure on seeing him to get out and walk, to ask about the farm.

All chanced as Flinter had expected. The carriage was sent on, when within a quarter of a mile of the house; and Mrs. Ashton began

questioning the bailiff, who veiled his triumph as well as he could, struggling to maintain his usual solid, sober demeanour.

"Well Flinter, how does the harvest get on?"

"Pretty well, ma'am, I am thankful to say."

"Good crops?"

"Very good, ma'am, as far as we can tell as yet. I will match my wheat against the new harrow man's any day."

"Ah! Flinter, you are always boasting of your crops," replied his lady without as usual making any comment on his obstinacy about that same new harrow, she being in uncommon good humour, from knowing herself set down as a considerable legatee in the will of the old maiden lady, whom she had just quitted.

"Any news?" she added carelessly.

"A little ma'am; I have caught Purcell's pigs."

"Have you?" exclaimed his lady in great delight. "I always said they only wanted

sharper looking after. And what have you done with them?"

"Oh! I put them in the pound."

"Right; and what then?"

"Why you see, ma'am, it was a bad business all together," replied Flint, scratching his head. "The woman and the poor children all came crying round me, saying they had not a penny to get them out of the pound; and they really did seem a'most starving, and to have nothing in the 'varsal world, but them pigs; for the father have got tumbled off a rick, and broke his arm; and so—you see ma'am, what could I do? and you not here to ax. I could not bear them crying about me; and so—I—paid the money myself, and just sent them a few potatoes, and such like; but they have promised that the pigs shall never be in the turnits agin; and I really do believe they will keep them up. And perhaps ma'am you would be kind enough to look in upon them, for they seems in great distress."

"I daresay they made you think so; but you believe every body that cries; I shall get at the truth. However you have shown that you could catch the pigs, and the man's having broken his arm is something."

"Is there any more news?"

"A little ma'am," replied Flinter recovering from his embarrassment about the Purcells, but still endeavouring to look very demure. "Master Edward is going to marry Miss Wilder."

"Nonsense; Mr. Robert you mean—or Miss Knight," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, who if she once got a fancy into her head, could with difficulty be induced to give it up.

"No, ma'am, I means what I say; I knew it would be long ago. You can ask Mr. Edward and Miss Wilder themselves, for there they are on the lawn together."

"Any more news?" enquired the lady in a guarded tone, not choosing to make any further comment on his last piece of intelligence.

"A little, ma'am. Lord Fitz Elwyn is going to marry Miss Clare. The earl and the countess have been here this morning to settle it, and pay the property visit, as I heard Master Charles say."

"You ought to know better than to make me the subject of an idle jest. Lord Fitz Elwyn and Miss Clare have never been even friends," exclaimed Mrs Ashton, drawing herself up with the dignity of a *parvenu* Duchess.

"It is no jest, ma'am; it is a truth, and nothing more. I see'd how it was long since; ay, and I had a hand in bringing it about too. Ax Lord Fitz Elwyn ma'am, if you don't believe me, he is on the lawn there with Miss Clare."

Mrs. Ashton was silent; but her flushed cheek and the biting of her lip proclaimed the vexation, which she would fain have concealed. Flinter could not quite suppress all show of triumph; and one glance of his twinkling eye revealed to Mrs. Ashton his purpose of paying

off some of the tiresome questions with which she had often tormented him, and determined her to give him no further cause for self-gratulation by a show of anger.

"Any more news?" she enquired in as indifferent a tone as she could assume.

"Only that Mr. Lake has turned out Miss Cecil's uncle, ma'am; and is to give her a fortune."

"Now I know that to be false," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton angrily, unable to maintain as she had resolved her silent dignity and philosophical indifference.

"It aint false, ma'am; you can ax Miss Emma, who is coming towards you now," answered Flinter with a most provoking chuckle.

"And I suppose you foresaw that too," observed his lady sharply.

"No, ma'am; I don't purtend to foresee every thing. Thomas Flinter never says what

is not true ; but he sees a great deal more than some folks thinks for."

"Are Edward and Lord Fitz Elwyn going to marry Helen Wilder, and Cecil Clare ; and is Mr. Lake the latter's uncle ?" enquired Mrs. Ashton of Emma, almost breathless with impatience.

"Yes, mamma."

"What all these ?"

"Yes, all."

"Then I have been very ill-used," said Mrs. Ashton, drawing herself up again, as she had drawn herself before. "I who spend all my time in making others happy and comfortable must be kept in the dark forsooth ; I did not think Cecil would have done this, at any rate ; I did not expect ingratitude from her."

"Nor shall you ever find it, my dear Mrs. Ashton," replied Cecil, coming up at the moment. "I could not tell you of my happiness before I knew it myself ; and even Emma was

as much surprised as yourself at finding that Lord Fitz Elwyn and I were not such foes as we appeared."

"At least I have cause of complaint against Lord Fitz Elwyn, Mr. Lake, and Mr. Ashton," she observed, only half appeased by Cecil's address; but Lord Fitz Elwyn, and Mr. Lake, or rather Mr. Moffatt, soon succeeded in dispelling her anger; and that once done, the prospect of three weddings in the family, and all such as she highly approved, made her the happiest, busiest woman in all her majesty's dominions.

Even Flinter was forgiven, and Mr. Ashton, who was obliged to plead guilty of concealing Mr. Lake's relationship to Cecil, escaped with only a half hour's curtain lecture, of which he contrived, by falling asleep, to hear only a quarter.

It was late when Robert returned from Miss Power's, where he now spent so much of his time; and his features grew more haggard as

he learnt from Charles the events of the day. There was no sleep for him that night, and his mother was so much alarmed by his looks in the morning, that she teased him into a downright passion by puffing her favorite drops, till Cecil in compassion carried her off, on the plea of some womanly consultation.

"Every body is going to be married I hear, so I do not see why I should not follow the general example," exclaimed Robert abruptly, following his father into his study.

"You marry!" repeated Mr. Ashton with natural surprise, his thoughts reverting to his lately avowed affection for Cecil.

"Yes, sir, I marry! I see you think it a little sudden; but

"Happy's the wooing
That's not long a doing."

and I want something to divert my mind," replied Robert, his lip, in spite of himself, quivering at the last words.

"I do not like such hasty proceedings. Who may the lady be?" enquired his father gravely.

"Miss Power."

"Never with my consent," exclaimed Mr. Ashton with unwonted energy and decision. "She is a vain, worthless coquette, and shall never have my sanction to enter the family."

"That must be as you please, sir. I say nothing in her praise; but I have flirted so long for my own diversion, and went so far last night, that as a man of honor I must make her an offer this morning. I would as soon be hanged; but still it must be done; and I must pay the penalty of my madness. Should she choose to wait for your consent, we must stand engaged. I will not marry without; and that is all that I can say. She expects me this morning, and I must keep the appointment."

Mr. Ashton would have remonstrated, but Robert, snatching up his hat, left the house on the instant; and when his father reached the door was striding towards Captain Power's in a state of mind that was closely bordering on insanity. Strange wooing he was like to make of it; but perhaps the lady would not be particular, he being an eldest son, and heir apparent to a good estate.

"Ah, Robert! I was just coming to you," exclaimed Captain Power, meeting him suddenly at a turn in the path.

"And what did you want of me?" enquired Robert loftily, his flashing eye bespeaking a great inclination to quarrel.

"To tell what I am sure, from your high regard for my sister, will give you pleasure. After you left us last night Sir Richard Sampson proposed to Harriet and was accepted. He was piqued by your attentions to my sister—attentions which Harriet and I knew very

well meant nothing; and finding him still a little inclined to jealousy, though without a cause, I thought it best to come and give you a hint, as I know you desire my sister's happiness as much as myself, and will equally rejoice at her splendid prospects."

"I was never more rejoiced in my life. Hurrah! for the bride and the bridegroom!" shouted Robert, his wild mood taking another turn, throwing up his hat, which lodged among the boughs; and then bursting into fits of laughter as he pelted the tree to bring it down, laughter in which Captain Power thought it as well to join.

"Now that you have regained your hat, and heard the news, I must go back again, for the baronet is to call this morning about settlements," said Captain Power, who, to do him justice, did feel some embarrassment at the part he was acting, conscious that he and his sister had done all they could to catch Robert

Ashton, whom they now so unceremoniously threw off for the sake of a better match.

"I will not detain you then, Power. Give my compliments to the bride elect, and tell her that no one more truly rejoices at her engagement; and that I greatly admire the wisdom of her choice. Sir Richard has the character of being a fool, but the selection he has made must disprove the charge. Good morning."

Captain Power bit his lip; but said nothing—and so they parted.

"What back so soon!" said Mr. Ashton, whom his son encountered in the plantation.

"Yes, sir; after my departure, the lady accepted Sir Richard Sampson, and dispatched her brother to me, lest I should keep the morning's appointment and spoil sport, the baronet being given to jealousy."

"I am heartily glad to hear it; and congratulate you on your escape," replied Mr. Ashton warmly.

“ I too am most thankful, sir, for being saved from the effects of my own folly,” observed his son, whose wild mood had sobered down into a more reasonable temper.

“ There is a letter for you on my table from your friend Whitehead.”

“ Is there ? Then I will go and get it.”

“ Cecil, I am come to wish you good bye,” cried Robert entering the sitting room where she chanced to be alone.

“ Are you going away then ?” she asked not knowing what to say.

“ Yes ; it is better for me, and for you too. I should be committing some wild act if I stayed, for I cannot as yet bear to behold his happiness, though I see that you feel for me. I understand your delicate kindness, and intend to prove myself worthy of your esteem ; but I must have time and thought for this. I am a strange creature, and want to comprehend every thing, so you must answer me one

question; I know all the rest from Emma. Why did you always blush and seem embarrassed when Fleetwood and Skinner were named? And why did you decline being introduced to them? Do not fear to pain me by your answer," he added, seeing that she hesitated.

"I had overheard them speak slightly of Lord Fitz Elwyn."

"I am answered. Would that I had been blessed with such devoted affection! But I did not deserve it; and will not pain you by recurring to the past. I am now going to the Lakes with Whitehead; but trust to regain sufficient firmness to attend Emma's wedding—and your's," he added with a shudder. "I must bear my fate as a brave man ought. God bless you, Cecil! and forgive me if I cannot at this moment congratulate you as I should."

Cecil was moved; her tears fell at his words

—his own gathered in his eyes, but he retained them from falling by a strong effort, and pressing her hand to his lips rushed from the room.

In the hall he encountered the viscount, who would have passed him with a formal bow, this being the first time they had met since the election.

“I cannot wish you happiness, my lord, for the words would choke me,” exclaimed Robert, addressing the startled Fitz Elwyn. “Bid Cecil tell you the cause of my former enmity, and learn from her to pity him, who loves as devotedly, though not as generously as yourself. We are foes no more—perhaps hereafter we may be friends.”

There was no time for reply, for Robert shot past him like an arrow; and Fitz Elwyn hastened on to learn from Cecil not only to forgive; but to esteem and admire his wayward rival.

The report of Cecil's approaching marriage

cost Mr. Fleetwood a bitter pang; and there were some who said that he would rather have lost his seat than his bride; but Mrs. Ashton, whose taste for weddings seemed to grow more insatiable every day, instead of giving credit to this, hoped that he would transfer his affection to Sarah, and Robert enact the lover towards Miss Knight. Indeed, Charles asserted that his mother was looking out for a match for him; but this she positively denied, declaring that he was too wild for any woman to think of.

Mrs. Ashton was in her element; bustling here—and bustling there: fidgeting this person—and fidgeting that;—fussing about cake, favors, and wedding clothes; but she showed in all her bustling and fussing so much real kindness of heart, and rejoiced so sincerely in Cecil's happy prospects, without one thought of jealousy for her daughters, that Lord and Lady Lindmoor soon learnt to overlook her foibles in consideration of her sterling good

qualities ; and according to Fitz Elwyn, there is some chance of the Earl's hereafter trying her never failing drops as he predicted.

" You going to marry Cecil Clare, Fitz Elwyn, and attached before I knew her ! I never thought of that, as Mr. Ashton would say," exclaimed Sir Thomas Willerton, when told the news on his return from town. " You must have hated me ; and I cannot sufficiently express my admiration of your generosity in not putting me to death by bowl or dagger."

" To tell the truth, I did wish us all drowned together in Alum Bay," replied Fitz Elwyn laughing.

" And very natural too ; only a more selfish lover would have wished me to be the sole victim. But why did not you tell me this, when I was raving about Miss Clare ?"

" Just because you were raving about her. Your love was so sudden that I had no time for confidence."

“ I have played the fool in my time certainly. However Miss Clare deserved to be raved about ; and I am not sure that I should have yielded her to you very willingly at that time ; but I am settled for life now, or shall be soon. What will the Fords say to their poor governess marrying the eldest son of an earl ? I detest all the tribe but Lotty ; so fat, so merry, and so good-natured.”

“ They are in speech all gratitude and delight, for Cecil has coaxed me and her uncle to let her adopt Lotty, as she calls it ; and the child is in raptures at the idea of being her dear cousin Cecil's bridesmaid. Mr. Ford has completely ruined himself by dabbling in railway and mining shares ; and the family have nothing but the interest of her little fortune, which cannot be touched, to live on. In consequence, Mr. Beckington Ford will have to seek another bride, Miss Hatton having declared off ; and the malicious propose that his

father, to gratify his *gourmandise*, should set up a *restaurant* in Paris."

"This is poetical justice; they deserve it better for their treatment of Cecil Clare, to whom, by the way, I am impatient to offer my congratulations, so let us be gone," cried the impatient baronet, hurrying off the not unwilling viscount to Ashton Grove.

"What have you hid in this quiet corner, in this very quiet field, Flinter?" asked Lord Fitz Elwyn, who, returning from a walk with Cecil a few days before that fixed for the wedding, wondered what object could have so completely engrossed the bailiff's attention, as to prevent his observing their approach.

"Oh! nothing particular, my lord," replied the embarrassed Flinter, turning away from the mysterious object in the corner of the field, and affecting an air of indifference, which sat so awkwardly upon him as to increase the viscount's curiosity.

"Nothing particular ! Why it is Mrs. Praed's new harrow I verily believe !" exclaimed his lordship, peeping round Flinter, who had made himself as large as he could in the vain hope of hiding the subject of enquiry.

"Well there, my lord, what could I do?" cried the poor baffled bailiff with cheeks as red as a robin's breast, and in a deprecating tone, finding further concealment hopeless. "You see, my lord, young Fraser was thrown from his horse just afore my door, so I could not as a christian do less than take him in ; and when the doctor said he must not be removed, I thought being in my house I must go and talk to him. So there we spoke about farming, and other things, nataral enough ; and he was so thankful for the little I did to make him comfortable, and prevent his getting in the dumps, that I could not refuse to try the harrow, though I am sure it won't do, when I found his heart was set upon it ; for you see my lord,

a sick man ain't like a man in health—he must be humoured a little. Besides, I find that he ain't so much of a furriner as I thought, for there is no crossing the sea to get into his country, as there is to get to the Frenches; and he says our Queen Bess cut off the head of one of his queens, and that our kings came out of his land; and there I used to think that it had been all the other way."

"No, Flinter, Fraser's history is quite correct; but I see how it is, you are getting a taste for new things, and will be trying sheep's head and haggis next."

"Ah! my lord, I see you and Miss Cecil are laughing at me; but again I ask what could I do, when the sick man made such a point of it, and in my own house too?" pleaded the discomfitted bailiff. "I find Fraser has very good notions of farming, thoff he is a furriner like. I hope you don't think me changeable and mean spirited, my lord?"

"Not at all, Flinter ; on the contrary, I think you acted as a kind and reasonable man ; but you will get such a taste for sheep's head and haggis that you will turn away from a piece of old English roast beef."

"No, no, my lord ; no fear of that. I am sure I shan't like them, only I promised to try them once, just to please him."

"Oh ! Flinter you are acquiring a dangerous taste for novelties ; the next thing you will be trying the Fab-nab-washerwoman, that you were talking to me about."

"Ah ! my lord ; that Fab-nab-washerwoman was a famous thing for me," exclaimed the honest bailiff, every show of embarrassment gone, and his little eyes twinkling with mischievous triumph. "It has turned out a hum, as I always said it would ; and let missus be teasing ever so bad, I have only to ax her about that, and she is quiet directly, and lets me do every thing as I like ; and so now when I

knows how I can stop her, I lets her go on the longer, for missus is a good woman in the main, if she would but leave me and the farm alone. She have a'most kept the Purcells ever since he broke his arm; and the pigs don't go in the turmits now. Yes, yes; that Fab-nab-washerwoman was a famous thing for me."

THE END.

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